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THE WAY TO VICTORY

VOLUME TWO: THE REPULSE

PHILIP GIBBS

THE WAY TO VICTORY

BY

PHILIP GIBBS

Author of "The Struggle in Flanders," "The Battles of the Somme," "The Soul of the War," etc.

IN TWO VOLUMES

VOLUME TWO

THE REPULSE

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THE REPULSE

THE WAY TO VICTORY

INTRODUCTION

LOOKING back upon the last phase of the war, with more detachment of mind than was possible to me or to any man in the actual tumult of it, certain aspects of the military and moral situation of the armies in conflict, and of the Armistice which followed the German surrender, stand out in clearer detail through the dust and smoke and slaughter on the battlefields.

The genius of one man, taking the highest risks with cool and thoughtful courage, dominates one's imagination in the retrospect of those days—the daring intelligence of Marshal Foch. He was fearfully handicapped by weakness of man-power immediately available as fighting units. His Army of Reserve was almost mythical in the blackest days of all when the enemy brought over all his available divisions from Russia, and struck blow after blow with enormous weight first against the British and then against the French, breaking through their defences each time and forcing them into rapid and perilous retreat. The British armies had been, as I have told previously, weakened to a tragic extent by the Battle of Flanders in 1917, when they lost 800,000 men in casualties, and then, before the German offensive in March of 1918, consented, generously and rashly, under strong political pressure from France, to take over a longer line of front. They were not strong enough to resist the German onslaught of 114 divisions to their 48, and after two months of heroic rear-guard fighting they

were hardly able to resist new attacks by which they were threatened from the reserve army under Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria.

It was then that Foch acted with extreme audacity. He dissipated what reserves he had by sending his cavalry and many of his picked divisions behind the British lines between Amiens and the coast of Belgium, thereby exposing his own front to inevitable weakness when the turn of the French army should come to bear the shock of heavy blows which he knew would be struck. Those blows came swiftly and terribly, and the Germans smashed their way across the Chemin-des-Dames, struck down through Fismes in a rapid drive, and reached the Marne. But they had been held up on the right by General Gourand outside Rheims, suffering vast losses under the fire of the French *soixante-quinzes,* and their advance had made for them a deep salient with exposed flanks. The German General Staff knew their own risk in establishing such a position, but they were confident that Foch had no reserves at hand to launch strong counter-attacks. The German Crown Prince was ordered to prepare another big drive which would carry him to Paris and break the spirit of the French armies and people.

Foch had but little time in which to act—a few short days—but with lightning decision he withdrew all the men who had gone rushing up behind the British lines—I shall never forget the thrilling sight of that tide of men streaming back along the roads in dense clouds of dust all through those days and nights—borrowed some of our best divisions, like the 15th, 51st, and 41st, and then sent forward the trained American divisions who had been fighting in the Argonne and in Lorraine. Those American constituted Marshal Foch's trump card. He held them up his sleeve, and he played them for all they were worth at the psychological moment, and they, as the world knows, responded to his call with supreme spirit and courage, on the Château-Thierry side of the German salient, as the British

and French troops did on the other sides. The trump card was played and won the game there on the Marne. German officers taken in those days were dazed and dumbfounded. Some of them said, "Who has attacked us?" and when they were told, "Foch's Army of Reserve," they answered bitterly, refusing to believe the facts by which they were defeated, "Foch has no Army of Reserve. It is all bluff. We have been told so by our High Command." Ludendorf choked when the news came to him and had an apoplectic seizure. He saw his doom ahead.

After that the British began a great counter-offensive on the Northern front, between Amiens and Albert, on August 8th, and that fighting which continued until November 11th, the day of Armistice, without any pause, was the most astonishing and glorious epic in the history of British arms. Those battles were fought by many divisions which had been broken to pieces in the German drive of March and April and had been filled up with young boys of 18 and 19 sent out from England's last reserves of youth, not trained in actual warfare, not hardened by life in the trenches. But the courage of those boys was marvellous and unfailing, and the veteran soldiers who bravened them, the men who had returned with healed wounds or had, by some miracle, passed unscathed through many battles, said, "Well done, kids!" and could not praise them enough. The Australians, Canadians, and New Zealanders became the spear-heads of the new attacks and made the first break in the enemy's lines, and fought on to the end in many great battles which shattered the German armies of the North until they could fight no more; but the English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish troops never lagged behind, and advanced day by day with grim and gallant endurance, smashing their way through German trench systems and through belts of machine-gun fire from scattered villages, flinging themselves across canal after canal, defended desperately, and capturing town after town, with vast numbers of prisoners, thousands of guns, and pro-

digious stores of war material. Their losses were heavy. The Canadians alone had 20,000 casualties outside Cambrai. Many English divisions lost half their strength, and some of them more than that. But with heroic spirit they went on, until the end came with victory. Marshal Foch himself paid a high tribute to this fighting of the British troops. "The hammer-strokes of the British," he said, "were the decisive factor in the German defeat." That is good enough, and gives the British soldier his due share of honour.

The enemy was broken in spirit and in body. When in September I saw the 2nd German Guards coming down in droves as prisoners in our hands after the breaking of the Hindenburg switch line between Quéant and Drocourt, cheering when they saw other groups arrive, and shouting, "Bravo! Bravo! Now the war will soon be over," I believed, for the first time, that the German Army was at the breaking point; and when later our English troops of the Midlands, with Americans on their left, crossed the great canal of St.-Quentin, and went clean through and beyond the main Hindenburg line, I knew that the Germans were defeated utterly.

And they knew it, and their officers and men admitted it, because beyond that Hindenburg line they had no more defensive systems, and the way to Germany lay open except for their rear-guard screens of machine-gunners covering a general retreat. So they sued for peace, sent a deputation to our lines under a white flag, and, by accepting the terms of Armistice drawn up by Marshal Foch, made the most abject and humiliating surrender ever signed by a great military power and nation.

Some people still, here in the United States, where I write this preface, are disappointed that the Armistice came too soon, and believe that if fighting had been continued for another three months or more Germany's defeat would have been more conclusive and assured. I do not agree with them. By November 11th the German armies were

utterly and absolutely defeated. They could neither refuse battle nor accept battle, and the strength of their war-machine had rotted away until it could not hang together. In the last phase of the war the British alone had captured 200,000 prisoners and an immense number of guns. The French and Americans had shattered the armies before them by great slaughter and great captures. The *moral* of the German troops was so miserable that apart from the extreme valour of their picked rear-guards of machine-gunners, the mass of their infantry was a rabble not only without the will to fight but with the deliberate determination not to fight. There were 15,000 deserters in Cologne when the British entered. Panic and despair and rage against the leadership which had led them to this ruin raised up the spirits of anarchy and revolution, and the German soldiers, no longer disciplined, and the German people, sickened by the rivers of blood which had drained their race, demanded peace, at any cost of humiliation, and surrender. They accepted the stern conditions of Marshal Foch without a murmur, and they left behind them, on their way out of France and Belgium, the broken bits of their war-machine. From Mons to Liège and Namur and the German frontier, the roads were strewn with abandoned guns, aeroplanes, and transport waggons. And when the Allied armies entered Germany and crossed the Rhine they brought with them their own artillery, and ranged their heavy guns across that river, so that now if any German army were to gather again and move many German cities would be wiped off the map at the word "Fire!" But no German army will gather or move. The German peasant and workman will not fight again in our generation. So our victory was complete—our military victory which came after many tragic years.

But there is another victory to gain, without which all the blood of our youth will have been shed without great avail to future generations. It is the victory of ideas over material force which must still be fought out in the souls

of men. It is the victory of lifting the moral power of the world above those old devilish forces of rivalry and greed which made a jungle of European states from which inevitably the Beast came out. In every civilised country now there is the passionate desire of men and women who went through the horrors of the war, who realised the outrage of it against God and humanity, to so alter the structure of international relations, and the social attitude of mind, so that this thing which has happened in our midst shall not come upon us again. They demand this as the fruit of sacrifice, and if the statesmen of the world fail to devise some plan which shall be a pledge of sanity among nations and an alternative to the breeding of man-children for cannon fodder in quarrels not in their interest or of their making—there will be in my opinion a rage and revolt against all present forms of Government, and the peoples will rise to overthrow the whole structure of our present civilisation in the wild hope that by their own power they may gain freedom from the menace of future wars and the liberty of their souls and bodies for better purposes in the scheme of life.

America and England, speaking the same language, obeying the same code of honour, inspired, largely, with the same ideals, have a supreme opportunity of lifting the world to a higher stage of moral development and of deciding the destiny of its peoples. In a closer and more understanding friendship between our two nations lies the hope of mankind in this time of renaissance, and because the youth of America and of England has shed its blood on the same fields for the same ideals it would be a crime and a tragedy if by small rivalries or petty prejudices we lost the opportunity we have of this fellowship in the betterment of the world.

PART V

FROM FLANDERS TO THE MARNE

I

The Saving of Amiens

In the following chapter I must, for the sake of saving space in a book that grows too long, summarize my narrative of the events which happened between the end of the German offensive in Flanders and the beginning of Marshal Foch's counter-offensive in July which has led to such wonderful success all along the Allied lines. That period covered a time of anxious waiting on the British front, when the armies of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, with twenty-nine fresh divisions in reserve, were making ready for another hammer-stroke against our lines, biding their time until they should know the result of the thrust delivered by the German Crown Prince between Soissons and Rheims. That blow was struck on May 26, and the enemy with overwhelming pressure of numbers broke the French front on the Chemin-des-Dames, where English divisions held the right flank, and drove the Allied troops across the Marne by Château-Thierry, with a dire threat to Paris. On the greater length of the British front from the Somme to the Ypres Canal there were during this time minor engagements, activity in raiding, and unceasing gun-fire, but on

the outer defences of Amiens, on both sides of the Somme, four divisions of the Australian Corps, commanded by General Monash, distinguished themselves by a number of small battles which relieved Amiens from the menace around it, and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy. At the same time the 1st Australian Division gave the enemy no peace in the neighbourhood of Merris and La Motte, near Bailleul, and so cowed the German troops left in the line there that they became utterly demoralized.

MAY 2

I WENT down the Australian way this morning, and found the officers and men looking very pleased with themselves under the hot sun, as they have good reason to be, after their splendid capture of Ville-sur-Ancre. They finished the mopping-up of that village south of Albert early to-day, and the total number of prisoners they have taken now amounts to 400, with something like thirty machine-guns. All yesterday the number of prisoners steadily mounted up, in the reports sent through, as new parties were discovered in the dug-outs and gathered up.

The method of the attack reminds me a little of the way in which the Australians recaptured Villers-Bretonneux. Like that, it was a cut-out process from both sides, and took place in the dark, except for a bright moon shining. It was not an easy affair, as the ground thereabouts gave natural defences to the village of Ville-sur-Ancre. On the north of it there is flooded ground, owing to the damming of the stream, so that the water is waist deep, and this flows into a number of parallel dykes used formerly for irrigation purposes by French farmers, which the enemy might use in case of need as trenches, up which they could enfilade our troops with machine-gun fire.

South of the village the ground rises into a spur in front of the hamlet of Morlancourt, and it was essential to the success of the Australian enterprise that this spur should be taken, and taken quickly. Also behind Morlancourt itself

there is a steep rise to a hill on which the Germans have posted many machine-guns, with which they can command a field of fire round Ville-sur-Ancre.

It was a daring thing, therefore, to attempt the capture of that little place. But the plans were worked out very carefully, and the men were keen. The officers were as keen as the men, and among them was a colonel who planted the Australian flag on Broodseinde Ridge in September of last year, and was eager to take command of his share in this new assault—an inspiring leader whom men are glad to follow.

For some reason unknown, the Germans strengthened their garrison that night by sending up reinforcements, so that Ville-sur-Ancre had its dug-outs and ditches full of men of the 54th Reserve Division and the 183rd. Many of these were young fellows, and some of them weedy lads with big spectacles, not typical of the German soldier at his best. It seems that they were hungry, too, having got separated from their rations for a time. But they put up a hard fight in the first hours of the attack, and the Australians did not have a walk-over, as on a few days previously, when the same officer who planted the flag on the hill in Flanders went out to a machine-gun post with sixteen volunteers and came back with twenty-two prisoners and not a single casualty.

This time it was a small battle—a hundred years ago it would have been described as a big battle, but the standard changes—extending for over 3500 yards of front, behind which the Germans had formidable defences and machine-guns sprinkled thickly. While one body of Australians worked north of the village across the swampy ground, another body, who had perhaps the hardest task, went straight for the spur opposite Morlancourt, with orders to work up on the left and join hands with their comrades through the village. Those on the left passed across the stream without great trouble, though some of them had to wade up to their belts. Then, according to

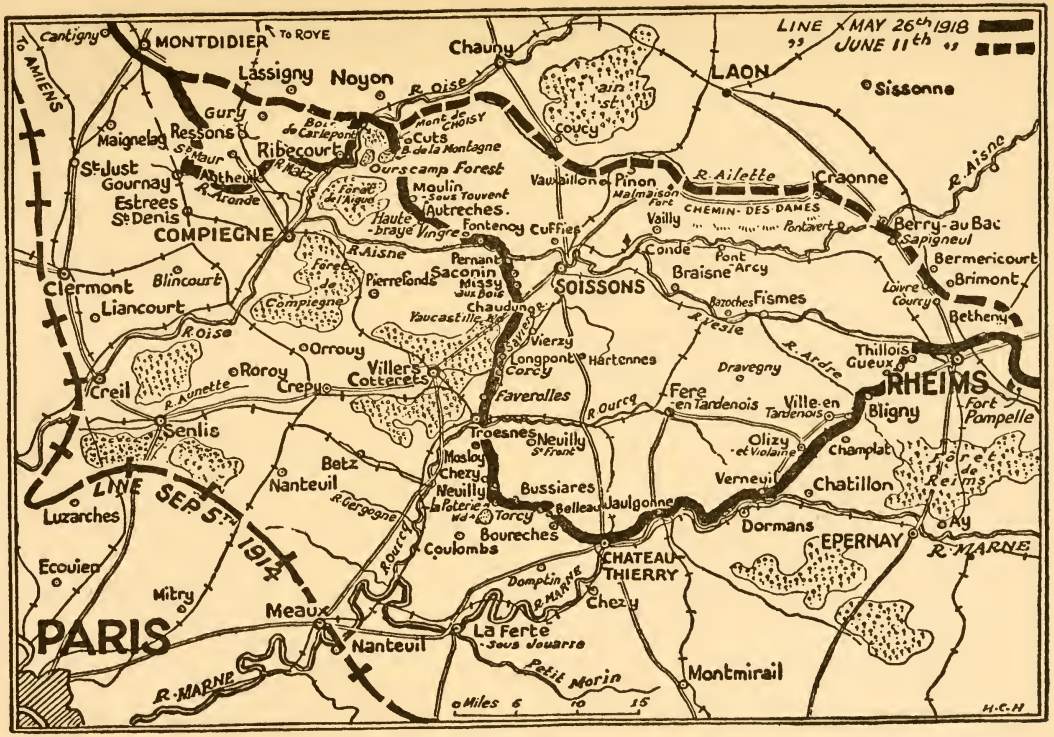
plan, they drove down parallel dykes towards the village. On the right other Australians swept on to the spur. Their advance was made all along the line behind a creeping barrage.

There was one obstacle they had to cross which might have given great trouble but for the men's quick and skilful attack and their enthusiastic courage. It was a long sunken road, from 20 to 30 feet steep. In the banks were many dug-outs and machine-gun posts, and outside there were wire entanglements through which the Australians had to force their way. It was likely that this place would be crowded with Germans, and they were found there when the Australians went to meet them. But they were quickly surrounded and overwhelmed, and the Australian success was complete.

JUNE 11

THE Australians do not leave the enemy in peace on their sectors of the Front, and the attack they made in the small hours of last night was very similar in its operation and success to the one done a week or so ago, up by Strazeele, when another body of them took a small but important ridge, inflicted heavy losses, and brought back 260 prisoners.

The latest Australian exploit was between Morlancourt and Sailly-le-Sec, beyond Amiens, and it seems that their total of prisoners will be about 300 when all have come down. I saw this morning those who were already back from the captured trenches, and they looked a good crowd of men, numbering over 200. A good many of them were young fellows of the 1919 class, mixed with older and stronger men. The attack surprised them, and after the bombardment began they expected to have time to get at their machine-guns, but as soon as the barrage lifted, and their officers shouted to the men to take up their machine-gun positions, they saw the Australians were on them and knew they were lost. Their battalions are divided among Prussians and Wurtembergers, and it seems that reserves



THE GERMAN ADVANCE TO THE MARNE

were sent up from the south side of Somme in case the Australian attack should spread further.

It was on a front of about 4000 yards, and was over 700 in depth, taking in the whole of a spur or saddle, as the Australians call it, overlooking Morlancourt and Sailly-le-Sec, which lie low in the marshes. The dash forward and the capture of this ground was made with the usual spirit of the Australian troops, who look upon these early morning adventures as a kind of fierce sport, with a risk of death in it that only tunes them up to an intenser vitality. But the Australians fight with science as well as spirit, because courage alone without the most severe training and disciplined action at every moment of the attack, with every man working for the team and doing his particular duty with the instinct that comes from constant practice, would lead certainly to failure. These attacks are planned out with the utmost care for minute detail, and rehearsed as if it were a ballet, in which every movement is essential to the general effect. Said an Australian senior officer: "It is like an orchestra in which the various instruments are played according to the score."

It was an orchestra of death last night for the Germans in front of Morlancourt, and especially for one battalion of the 90th Reserve Infantry Regiment, which, according to some of their men, was practically wiped out. Many of their losses were from hand-grenades in close fighting after the Australians were in their trenches. The prisoners were glad of their escape, and, although many of them looked haggard after the horror of the night, they ate the rations of bully-beef given to them this morning with a healthy appetite. One of them told some of our officers that many of his brother officers were killed this morning, and that they had no chance as soon as the attack was launched. He spoke generally about the war and said it was started for trade purposes because Germany needed elbow room for her growing population and a greater command of the world's markets. It was true that in a military way Ger-

many had started the war, but before that he said the war had been started by the alliance between England, France, and Russia, which hemmed Germany in.

When he was asked if he thought they were winning he said, "As a German, I hope and believe so. If we do not win we are utterly lost."

JUNE 19

IT is fair and pleasant in France during this time, between battles, and one forgets some of the grimmer side of the business when one sees our men in their camps behind the lines under the full foliage of the trees, or watering their horses by streams where many flowers grow in the tall grass, or taking a rest on the march in forests where the sunlight is glinting down the glades. British, French, and American soldiers are wonderfully intermingled now, so that one finds the three Allies in the same villages and on the same roads and seated at table in the same wayside inns.

Our most inquisitive eyes are for the Americans, who are the latest types to enter this arena, where the battles of the world's destiny are being fought. The intonation of their voices is a new note in the villages through which one passes, and there is a sense of a new chapter of history having opened when one asks the way from one of their traffic men, or gets a salute in the American style, or meets a column of lads on the march with long packs down the middle of their backs and a ragtime tune on their lips. They are coming in numbers now, in a steady flow which laps over wide tracts of country where three years ago our new armies were billeted and encamped on their way to the fighting-lines. This visible proof of the big numbers of these crowds of tall lads who come tramping through France as the vanguard of greater armies make one feel safer from the horrible menace that has always sprawled over France since August of 1914, and in them is the hope that whatever may happen, in danger or in tragedy, the worst of all can never happen now.

Romance has gone from our Army a long time ago.

These scenes of war have become too familiar to us for any sense of romance, and most of our men are realists, to whom the adventure of war has become a routine and a boredom between hours of abominable danger. But the American soldiers are so fresh that romance has not been killed for them, and it is all a new and wonderful adventure, and we, who are stale to the aspect of things, find a new interest in familiar surroundings because of the novelty of it all to these newcomers. For all these men are four years younger in war than ourselves, and it seems a wonderful youth. To them the look of a French village, the first sight of a strafed town, the little ways of French peasants, the broken English of French children are novel and amusing, and they find a huge entertainment in every incident of the day, as our old armies did in the summer of 1914.

Our own new drafts are splendid, too, and it is to me and all of us, I think, a very moving thing to see these lads of ours, who have come out with the youngest classes to fill up the gaps in the ranks of the older men. Some of them look very young, but hard and fine, as they go swinging by, with their rifles slung, the future heroes of the battles that, alas! must be fought before the end comes. We are ready now for any attack that the enemy may launch upon our front, and I give him fair warning, for what it is worth, that when he attacks next time he will come up against lines of men who will make him pay as great a price for any gain as those who held him round Arras, who flung him out of Villers-Bretonneux, and smashed assault after assault between Givenchy and Béthune.

II

Khaki and Blue

June 30

The last day of June finds us still waiting for the next phase of the German offensive, which began with enormous

effort on March 21, when our situation was serious. Looking back on these last three months, especially the beginning of them, when for several weeks our armies were hard pressed and had to fight continual rear-guard actions against overwhelming numbers, when our losses were heavy and our troops had to give ground which had been gained by desperate and heroic endeavour in the early battles of Flanders and the Somme, one has a sense of thankfulness that the enemy was checked before he could do greater damage, and that we forced him to give us time to reorganize and build up new strength.

Our armies, with young drafts that have filled up gaps, are now strong in defence again, and during the last two months, while the enemy has been preparing for fresh assaults on a prodigious scale, an immense amount of work has been done behind our lines and in our lines to give us greater security when the next thrust comes.

During the last three months of history, full of menace and tragedy and terror in their early days, one thing has happened which ought to count for something in the future of the world. It is the closer comradeship and finer understanding between the French and British Armies, and between the British soldiers and the French people. In all the experiences which followed March 21 our men were struck most by the tragic plight and courage of the villagers and country folk, who were caught in the moving tide of war. Shells came smashing into some of their towns before they could escape, and some of them were killed, and many villages and hamlets which had been safe behind our line, so that the fields were cultivated as though in a world away from war, were brought suddenly into the danger zone. The women there were wonderful, and young girls gallant beyond all words of praise, and it is splendid to remember that during those bad days the admiration and pity of our men for these defenceless people were translated into helpful acts which have left a deep impression in France. Amidst the traffic of guns and

transport, when our armies were falling back with the enemy close upon them, our Tommies crowded civilians into lorries and wagons, fed them with their own rations, carried their babies for them, and rescued their old people, at the risk of their own lives, from villages under shell-fire. These things will not be forgotten.

During that time also there was a new brotherhood of arms between French and British soldiers. The French realized that our armies had been confronted with the full and frightful weight of German hordes, and that our line, strung out too thinly for its numbers, had sustained the thrust of so many German divisions. When our stricken troops had fought themselves out, not without inflicting the heaviest losses upon the enemy, French troops poured up from Amiens to Flanders, and that new strength assisted in bringing the Germans to a standstill. It was then that the brotherhood of the French and British armies was sealed as never before. Fighting men of both nations intermingled. They fought side by side in battles round Meteren and Vierstraat, and the French at Kemmel under a terrible bombardment—Verdun was a bagatelle to it, I was told by those French officers—knew what British troops had faced during all battles in Flanders last year, and had a deeper understanding of British courage. Our men were loud in praise of the French troops, startled by their splendid physique, for on the whole they are taller and bigger fellows than ours, and full of admiration for their skill and gallantry. For almost the first time during this war great bodies of French and British troops were intermingled—we have been very aloof from each other until then—and it has created a mutual esteem which will not disappear.

Then a few weeks ago came the attack on the French at Chemin-des-Dames, and on the right of the French between Cerny and Berry-au-Bac. There were four English divisions—the 50th, the 8th, the 21st, with the 25th in support, who had been sent down there to have a quiet time,

after having suffered exceedingly in fighting against overwhelming odds since March 21. Their strength included a considerable number of new drafts who had never been under fire.

Well, what happened belongs already to history, though not all its details have yet been told. The Germans concentrated over forty divisions secretly behind the Chemin-des-Dames, and forced their way through the French and British lines, and advanced to Château-Thierry. The French General Staff and all the French officers state that the British divisions, weak as they were and faced by heavy odds, fought with the most heroic and stubborn courage until the enemy had been driven down to Fismes, far below them on the left, so that their remnants had to fall back to the line of the River Vesle, and make a new stand there. Afterwards they fought with and among the French until the middle of this month, and French soldiers cannot say too much about the gallant spirit of "Nos Tommies," who share their rations and their risks.

It was a tragic business for these divisions of ours, but when all is told the heroism of these men who made a last stand on the River Aisne will shine out in the pages of history. The general outline has been told, especially with reference to the 15th Division, on the left by Craonne, and the 21st, on the right by Berry-au-Bac. Both these divisions came under terrific gun-fire on the morning of the attack, and the German artillery, not satisfied with its effect on the line of the 21st Division, withdrew their infantry which were being raked by machine-gun and rifle fire, and started another and more violent bombardment until our defensive lines were destroyed.

The 8th Division who were in the centre of the British line had the same desperate adventure. They were holding a line of about 10,000 yards—about six miles. For some days they were delighted with their situation, and thought it Paradise after the Somme battlefields. They were on a wooded plateau above the river and canal of the Aisne,

with lines of hills in front of them, and behind them another chain of hills.

It was beautiful country, with hardly sound of gun to break its quietude, and the weather was gloriously warm, so that they used to bathe in the canal and lie about basking. They could see the German trenches some 2000 yards away, and there was never any sniping if they showed themselves, and no sign of abnormal movement in the enemy's lines.

"A blooming picnic," said Tommy, very happy with himself. But in the afternoon of May 26 a telephone message came over, breaking this spell of tranquillity. It was a message to say that the enemy intended to attack on the Chemin-des-Dames next day, and that the British troops must prepare for battle.

The infantry assault began about four in the morning, and by five o'clock reports were received at headquarters that the enemy was attacking the battle zone and that all units in the outpost line had been cut off to a man. At that time the fog was so thick that men could see only forty to fifty yards ahead. At five minutes past six a pigeon message, dated 5.15 A.M., was received from the colonel of the Royal Berks, saying that he and his headquarters staff were surrounded. "Germans threw bombs down dugout," he wrote, "and passed on. Appear to approach from right in considerable strength. No idea what has happened elsewhere. Holding out in hopes of relief."

That was one of the few messages received from men on the other side of the river up there in the outpost line. The thrust of the Germans seems to have fallen first, as far as the 8th Division was involved, on the right, and the men, holding and fighting desperately, were gradually forced back, except where the Berkshires were still holding their ground. Reinforcements from a Lancashire regiment were sent forward in support, and the troops continued to resist stubbornly, causing the enemy heavy losses, until they were borne down by the overwhelming weight of

numbers, the Germans using Tanks against those on the left.

By 6.30 that morning the brigade on the right had fallen back to the line of the river at Germicourt. Meanwhile the troops holding the centre and left had been fiercely attacked from about five o'clock, and these, including Northumberlands, who were very gallant, held their positions in the battle zone against the repeated onslaughts, until the Germans crossed the little River Miette in a turning movement from the south-east, taking them in flank and rear.

After that, British troops who remained then fought with the French for nearly a fortnight more, until the Germans were definitely brought to a dead halt on the Marne. During that time French "Poilus" and their officers showed a fine spirit of comradeship with our lads, and the French Army as a whole knows now that our divisions fought like heroes from first to last, not yielding ground until they were utterly overwhelmed by numbers. And our army knows that the French troops, faced by the same great odds, were most glorious in the way they fought back, step by step, with heroic self-sacrifice, until the peril was averted.

There can be no misunderstanding between these French and British soldiers, who fought as brothers in arms in that long battle when the fate of France and England was at stake. The people of both nations must know these things, and remember them.

III

Australians and Americans

July 4

By their surprise attack this morning the Australians have taken possibly 1500 prisoners in an advance of one and a half miles on a four-mile front, including the village of Hamel and the trench system beyond it south of the Somme. Their own losses are astonishingly light.

When I went down into the Australian area this morning it was difficult to believe that the attack had taken place, for there were none of the usual scenes which follow a battle, however successful, showing the price that must be paid nearly always for victory. There was no great traffic of ambulances on the roads. I passed several casualty clearing-stations, above which the Red Cross flags waved, but their tents were empty, and there was nothing doing at that hour in the morning. There was no long trail of lightly wounded men.

Even the guns seemed no more noisy than on any fine morning when there is good visibility for harassing fire; and behind the lines, at the headquarters of the divisions engaged, there was an air of tranquillity which did not suggest a morning of battle. The truth is that the enemy was so utterly surprised, and the Australians were so perfectly successful, that the whole action was completed an hour or so after its start, hundreds of prisoners had been sent down under escort, and the record of a brilliant little victory was already being written.

The Tanks, which co-operated with the infantry, were one of the main causes of the surprise and overthrow of the German defenders. The German prisoners, including a battalion commander and two adjutants, are very sick men because they are now in our hands. They confess that up to three o'clock this morning they had not the faintest idea that they were going to be attacked.

Our artillery in this region was very strong, and their fire was so planned that immediately the attack opened it would neutralize the enemies' guns while the infantry advanced. This, indeed, is what happened, and at eight minutes past three o'clock this morning, when the bombardment opened with intense drumfire and with concentrated counter-battery work, the German artillery reply was so late and so feeble that the Australians were well on their way to their last objectives before the first shells fell on the old German front line.

The enemy holding the ground south of Vaux-sur-Somme garrisoning the village of Hamel and Vaire Wood and the trench system on the other side of Hamel, belonged to three divisions of Prussians and Rhinelanders. These divisions were the 43rd, the 77th, and the 13th, the last, who were all men of the Rhine, having come down lately to this sector from the area round Lens. They had been suffering from the prevailing epidemic of influenza, and were not intending to attack us, hoping, rather, for a quiet time, but kept on tenterhooks by the presence of the Australians in the front of them, who do not give their enemies much peace.

There was the usual amount of harassing fire from our guns in the early part of the night, neither more or less than that, and the Australian brigades took up their assembly places in dead quietude, doing their best to prevent any sound of human movement from alarming the men on the other side of No Man's Land; they were all on the top note of confidence and enthusiasm in believing that victory was going to be easy and quick as soon as the guns got to work. At one place, in front of the German earthworks called Pear Trench, which bulged out in a small salient, the Australians had to creep up close and lie there before the attack; 3.10 was the minute when the infantry were to move, and two minutes before then the drum-fire began with a deafening roar.

"It reminded me of Pozières," said an Australian officer, who wears a wound stripe dating from that old battle. It reminded him of Pozières because of the tremendous concentration of artillery and its tumult of fire.

Under this widespread flight of shells—the bombardment extended over a wide front—the Tanks started forward. Smoke screens were sent up in front of them in dense clouds, which lay low on the ground to hide them from the German anti-Tank guns, and into this fog they went, nosing their way at a steady pace.

Beside the officer and crews shut up inside their steel

walls working the engines and the guns, there were three or four men sitting on top utterly exposed. Their legs dangled over the sides of the Tanks like those of boys going for a joy ride, and in this way they rode into hell-fire, as it seemed to men watching them, because of the smoke screens and the flashes of the shells beyond. The infantry followed in waves, loose open lines of men, extending forward as they went close to the barrage rolling slowly on ahead of them, so close that they took the risk of being wounded by our own fire, but preferred this risk to the more deadly one of lagging behind and giving time for German machine-gunners to get to work.

There were only a few places where the German machine-guns opened fire and gave trouble. One of those positions was in Pear Trench, where no Tank could get into position, and here the enemy fought stubbornly, firing his machine-guns with persistent tattoo until they were rushed by the Australians.

Elsewhere some of the German anti-Tank guns fired some rounds, and three or four of our Tanks were put out of action for a while, but their casualties were small, and most of them rounded up large numbers of Germans, sweeping the country with their fire, manœuvring over all this ground with the infantry in their wake, and returning safely to our side of the lines when their morning's work was done.

All this battle happened in a kind of twilight. At three o'clock there was the faint light of dawn over the trenches and the woods, and ten minutes later there was fair visibility for 300 yards ahead, as tested on other mornings by Australian staff officers. In this half light, fogged over certain lines by the smoke wreaths, the Australians made their way, shouting for the enemy to surrender. In most cases the Germans gave no trouble, but held their hands up meekly, and came out of their trenches and dug-outs, huddling together without their weapons and showing no sign of fight. They had been utterly surprised, and were

caught so quickly that our troops were through them and beyond them before they could put up a defence with any hope of holding their ground. They submitted to the inevitable fate that was on them, and were glad to follow their escorts back before their own guns should annihilate them.

Above the fog and in the pale sky over this battlefield flew many aeroplanes. They were like a swarm of bats over the heads of the infantry, and swooped low to drop bombs on the German positions. They flung many bombs into the little ruined village of Hamel, making a hell of the place and lighting fires there in advance of the assault.

Many of the Germans had their gas-masks on when they came out of holes in the ground, and held their hands up because they believed that the smoke clouds sent over to screen the Tanks were poison gas. During all this first phase of the attack there was hardly a sign from the German artillery, which was kept very silent by the concentrated fire of our batteries, and the Australians were able to wander over their captured ground in great ease, and every man among them searched for a prisoner whom he could claim as his very own. The few wounded were carried back on stretchers, and the lightly wounded men strolled back with amazing tales of their walk-over. It was only later in the morning that the German guns from other directions turned their fire on to the captured ground, and especially on the village of Hamel, which for the first hour or two had been as quiet as any hamlet a hundred miles behind the lines, except for a few fires burning after our airmen had dropped their bombs.

Meanwhile, on ground north of the attack, other bodies of Australians made raids and demonstrations and small holding attacks, and in this work of support to the main thrust captured a good many prisoners and machine-guns, although that was not really part of their programme.

It was a great day for the Australians, and this morning I found their officers merry and bright, though most

of them had had no sleep and had an anxious day ahead of them. "The joy of the thing," said one of them, "is that we have taken the initiative again, and that is much better than waiting for attack. It is better for us and worse for the enemy. Our men have their tails waving over their heads, and the Germans are very down to-day." This brilliant little success has come to us on American Independence Day, and is the best celebration of that historical event, which has a deeper significance for us now that the American soldiers are so strong on the soil of France.

Many little villages I passed through to-day were beflagged by the French in honour of their Allies, and in many places of France and Belgium there were reviews and celebrations of America's national feast day.

JULY 5

IN the Australian attack south of the Somme yesterday morning the enemy, whose guns had been almost silenced during the battle by intense counter-battery work, shelled some of our new positions rather heavily, and in the evening made three counter-attacks. These seem to have been directed on the wings and centre of the Australian line, but were feeble and unsuccessful. Groups of German machine-gunners and infantry established themselves within fifty yards of the Australians, who were annoyed by this close approach and decided not to tolerate it. So last night a number of them went out and drove in the German outposts and brought back another batch of prisoners to the number of something over fifty.

I was unable to mention yesterday one of the most interesting features of this action, and that was the share taken in the fighting by American troops. There were not many of them compared with the strength of the Australian brigades, but these few companies were eager to go forward and meet the enemy face to face for the first time, and to prove their fighting quality. They have proved it up to the hilt of that sword which is in their temper and

spirit, and the Australian officers with whom I spoke yesterday and to-day all told me that the Americans attacked with astonishing ardour, discipline, and courage. If they had any fault at all it was over-eagerness to advance, so that they could hardly be restrained from going too rapidly behind the wide belt of our own shell-fire as the barrage rolled forward.

It was an historic day for them and for us. It was the Fourth of July, the day of American Independence, when, as I described yesterday, many French villages quite close to the fighting-lines were all fluttering with the tricolour and the stars and stripes in honour of their comradeship in arms, and symbolizing the hope of France in the united strength of the armies that now defend her soil. And it was the first time that American soldiers have fought on the British front. They understood that upon their few companies fighting as platoons among the Australians rested the honour of the United States in this historic episode. Their general and his officers addressed them before the battle, and called upon them to "make good."

"You are going in with the Australians," they said, "and those lads always deliver the goods. We expect you to do the same. We shall be very disappointed if you do not fulfil the hopes and belief we have in you."

The American boys listened to these words with a light in their eyes. They were ready to take all risks to prove their mettle. They were sure of themselves and tuned up to a high pitch of nervous intensity at the thought of going into battle on the Fourth of July for the first time. There were thousands of other American soldiers desperately eager to go with them, though a battle is not a pleasant pastime. But all their training, all their purpose in this war, all their pride in their own regiments, lead up to the fighting-line, and they wanted to pass the test of it, and measure their spirit against its terrors and dangers. In the hearts of these men, new to war and fresh out in France, the adventure of battle is greater than its chance

of pain or death, and calls to the hunter's instinct in them. So they went gladly and fiercely, strange as it may seem to people who after four years of war look only on the tragic side of it, and the Australians had many requests from American companies who were not allowed a share to go with them. "Can't we lend you a hand?" they asked. "Can't we be of any use to you?"

In one case outside the order of battle their offer was accepted. The Australians took so many prisoners that they found it difficult for the moment to provide a proper escort for them from the forward enclosure to the back. "Some of your lads might help us conduct the prisoners," said the Australian officer in charge of this work. They did help. No German prisoners have had such a strong and proud escort as that provided by the Americans, who had not the luck, as they thought it, to take part in the actual fighting with their comrades who had gone forward with the Australian infantry and Tanks into the smoke clouds and the light of shell-fire. Up there those lads from Illinois and Chicago were engulfed in the frightful excitement of battle, and found it an easier and less fearful thing than they had thought because of the utter surprise of the enemy and the silencing of his guns. More formidable to them was the intensity of our own gun-fire, which swept the ground in front of them, close to them, with a backward blast of shell-splinters and an infernal tumult of drumfire. They could not tell at first whether it was our barrage or the enemy's. They seemed to be in the centre of its fury, and were surprised to find themselves alive, still moving forward with their comrades, and with dark lines of Australians on either side of them.

"The barrage passed like a storm," said an Australian officer, "leaving behind perfect peace," and it was in this peace of the battlefield, like the peace of death, that the Americans and Australians met groups of men who were the enemy, strange, uncanny creatures, many of them in their gas-masks, and with their hands up in submission,

knowing that surrender was their only chance of life. Those who showed fight, like some who used their machine-guns to the last, had hardly a thread of chance. The Americans were not tender-hearted, in that eighty minutes of advance to the ultimate objective, with any enemy who tried to bar their way. They went forward with fixed bayonets, shouting the word *Lusitania* as a battle cry. Again and again the Australians heard that word on American lips, as though there were something in the sound of it strengthening to their own souls and terrifying to the enemy. They might well have been terrified, any Germans who heard that name, for to American soldiers it is a call for vengeance. It is a curious fact that with less provocation than the French, who see their own towns destroyed before their eyes, and a great belt of ruin across their country, and a world of tragedy where their own families are separated from them by the German lines, the American soldiers have come over here with such a stern spirit, and with no kind of forgiveness in their hearts for the men who have caused all this misery. To-day young American soldiers who have come out of the battle wounded tell their experiences, and through them all is the conviction that the Germans are "bad men," and that death is a just punishment for all they have done. One young corporal, with a most boyish look, described in a simple way how before the battle he was placed in charge of twenty-four of his comrades because he had worked hard and done his best to become a good soldier, and how then he and they had gathered together the night before going into the line and had resolved to inflict as much loss upon the enemy as they could because that was their duty. Not knowing that they would ever meet again in this life they then shook hands with each other, and the young corporal placed himself at the head of the platoon and went with them up to the support line, and afterwards to the front line. None of them had seen a front-line trench before, as their regiment had only come to France a few weeks ago, and for

the first time they saw shell-fire, and then, two minutes before the attack, a barrage. It astounded them so that they held their breath, but kept their nerve. "It was a real Fourth of July celebration," said this boy. The line of country in front of them to Hamel village, and the trench system beyond, was over a little ridge, and then into a valley, and then over another small ridge or fold of ground. In the valley they were held up for a few minutes by some barbed wire and machine-gun fire, but got forward and did not meet much trouble in Hamel. It was beyond that in the trench system that the Germans fought hard, though some surrendered without fighting. Two of them ran forward, shouting "Kamerad" to the young American corporal, who did not understand their meaning, and would have killed them but for an officer who told him not to touch them. A little later he was wounded by a bullet, and as he stumbled to his knees two Germans ran at him with bayonets. He had his finger on the trigger of the rifle and shot one dead as he came forward. But the other drew near with his bayonet lowered.

"Then," said this corporal, who is no more than a boy in looks, "I knew I had to get up and fight him like a man." He stood up in spite of his wound, and with his fixed bayonet turned aside the lunge which the German made to kill him, and then swung up his rifle and cracked the man's skull.

Another American corporal, twenty-one years of age, was wounded three times, but killed seven Germans, which, as he reckons, is two for each wound, and one over. He had an astounding series of episodes in which it was his life or the enemy's. After going through the enemy's wire near Vaire Wood he found himself under fire from a machine-gun hidden in a wheatfield, and was wounded badly in the thigh with an armour-piercing bullet designed for Tanks. He fell at once, but staggering up again, threw a bomb at the German gun-crew and killed four of them. One ran and disappeared into a dug-out. The American

corporal followed him down, and the man turned to leap at him in the darkness, but he killed him with his bayonet. He went up from the dug-out again to the light of day above, and a German soldier wounded him again, but paid the price for the blow by his own life. Another German attacked him, wounded him for the third time, and was killed by this lad whose bayonet was so quick. That made six Germans, and the seventh was a machine-gunner, whom he shot. By this time the American corporal was weak and bleeding from his wounds, and while he lay, unable to go further, he hoisted a rag on to his rifle as a signal to the stretcher-bearers, who came and carried him back.

The American companies had very light casualties and are satisfied that they accounted for many of the enemy. They are glad of that in a simple, serious way, and the spirit shown by these American soldiers in action on our British front for the first time seems to me, in spite of their youth, like that of Cromwell's Ironsides, stern and terrible to the enemy, who to them is an enemy of God and mankind. Before this war is over the German soldiers will come to know and fear that spirit which is a new revelation on this Western Front, for our men and the French, fierce as they are in attack, are different in temperament, and are inspired by different psychological laws. As yet the Germans do not know much about the army that is growing in might against them. The prisoners I saw today under guard by the Australians had no idea how many American soldiers there are in France, and were astonished to meet some of them in this last battle. They believe that we exaggerate their numbers grotesquely in order to scare them, and they have been utterly deceived by their rulers.

These Germans now in our hands, after the brilliant attack by the Australians with these American companies, impressed me certainly as being among the best quality of men I have yet seen taken on our front. Rhinelanders, Brandenburgers, and Westphalians, they were tall men in

the prime of young manhood, and obviously well nourished. They said themselves to our officers that though their rations have deteriorated since the early days of the war, and one man spoke with the authority of four years' service, they are not at all bad, as whatever happens about food in Germany the soldiers are provided first with enough to keep up their strength. They were tired and spent after their battle, and lay about on the grass, sleeping in every attitude of extreme weariness, but their discipline is still so good, even on our side of the lines, that when an Australian sergeant gave an order in their own tongue—he knows it perfectly, having been a student for four years at Charlottenburg—the *feldwebel,* or German sergeant-major, sprang up at attention as though a bell had rung in his ear, and the other men rapidly obeyed the command to fetch their rations.

There are few details of the general battle which I can add to my account of it yesterday. It went absolutely according to plan and without a hitch. The enemy's losses were great, not only on the field, but behind his lines, where our artillery did great carnage. Many of his guns were put out of action by direct hits, and yesterday, when he sent up horses to try and drag them away, they were scattered by our fire and failed in the attempt. The Australians captured large numbers of machine-guns, and many of these were at once turned on to the enemy and fired all day with his own ammunition, as every Australian machine-gunner is perfectly familiar with the handling of the German weapon. The Commander-in-Chief has sent the Australian corps and the American companies his congratulations on their successful operation, which was carried out with such skill and gallantry. Certainly the Australians have never lost the initiative since the day of March 26, when at the end of the first phase of the German offensive they arrived on the battlefield with one battalion, increased to four that afternoon, when they thrust back the German outposts and helped to bar the way to Amiens.

Since then they have made several successful attacks, driving the enemy's lines back from Villers-Bretonneux and the valley of the Somme in front of Morlancourt, and capturing many hundreds of prisoners. But yesterday was one of their finest achievements because of its rapid success, the lightness of their own losses, and the number of prisoners, and the Australian soldiers who were lightly wounded came riding happily back on the tops of the Tanks, of whom they are now hero-worshippers because of their great share in the success of the day.

IV

The French Advance Across the Marne

July 18

While the battle in Champagne is being fought by French and American troops, the British armies from Flanders to the Somme remain on the alert.

This morning's news of Foch's dramatic counter-blow between Soissons and Château-Thierry, with its menace of turning the enemy's right flank, will have great effect on our men. It is what we have been hoping for. It is in the tradition of the Foch school of strategy, which he has had to deny himself so long because of the enemy superiority in numbers at the beginning of the offensive. But now at last the balance of numbers on the Western Front has begun to tip in our favour, and Foch is able to use his reserves with greater freedom and surety of striking power. The enormous patience of the French general, whose motto is attack, was put to the severest strain after March 21, when for many weeks he had to husband his forces and remain on the defensive. But this morning, the hour of waiting passed and, after checking the enemy's enormous efforts on each side of Rheims, he seized the psychological

moment to strike him on the right wing of the German salient between the Aisne and the Marne.

Our own future depends intimately on the progress of that French counter-stroke, and on the necessity of the German Crown Prince for more men to replace all those dead and bleeding soldiers who lie on the slopes and in the valleys east and west of Rheims. He is as deeply engaged now as he was at Verdun, and he cannot call off the battle which he began after months of preparation. Opposite the British front, in some old château of France, behind the German lines far beyond the zone of our gunfire, there is a group of men who must be reading the reports from the Crown Prince's staff with extreme anxiety and nervous tension.

Chief among them is Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria, commanding the group of armies against the British front, and with him are his army commanders and corps commanders, amongst them Sixt von Armin, who was our opponent in the first battles of the Somme, and von Bernhardi, who, it is said, has the most passionate hatred of us among all the German generals. These men have been preparing another wide offensive against the British front.

They are the men who have their eyes on the coast as the goal of their desires, and are ready even now to make another desperate bid for it. They have been working hard since their previous efforts came to a dead halt, after heavy losses. Hundreds of thousands of men under their command have been put to the uttermost strain, building light railways over the old battlefields, making and repairing roads, digging new gun-pits and communication trenches, and weaving a network of telephone wires so that on a given morning all the material of war shall be at hand for his assaulting troops, and every means of communication shall be ready for them.

It all takes longer time than they hoped to give to the job, because they knew that every week that passed enabled us to dig stronger lines against them and reorgan-

ize and strengthen our defensive power. Their programme of speed has been slowed down by the epidemic of influenza, which hit them badly several weeks ago, and spread with such virulence that many of their battalions were incapable of hard work, and hundreds of men went sick in many divisions. It seems to be burning itself out now, this fever which makes men fall off their horses and sink at the knees quite suddenly, with a high temperature, that keeps them weak for six days or so; but even now there are large numbers of cases, limiting the output of work in the preparations for attack.

Other things have delayed and weakened them. British aeroplanes yesterday, as every day for months past, have flown low over their lines and back areas, bombing and machine-gunning their working parties, causing heavy casualties, and doing destructive work over their railways, aerodromes, camps, and dumps. And British guns have used every fine hour to range on their batteries and trenches and roads and railheads, causing more casualties and destroying work newly done, so that it has to be begun again. More delay irritating to German generals, who know the value of time. More delay and greater demoralization of troops holding the line.

But Rupprecht and his generals, ready to begin this offensive against the British, have now another anxiety which may spoil all their plans. Their elaborate preparations are useless if they have not enough men to throw in at the moment arranged.

If this great attack east and west of Rheims had gone well, he would still have enough men, and more than enough, to strike with immense strength, such as he is bound to have, considering the defensive preparations we have made. But what if orders come to send divisions to the help of the Crown Prince, now seriously jeopardized by the French counter-blow? The whole problem of Rupprecht and his generals and the history of the next few weeks rest on that development of events. If Prince Rupprecht of

Bavaria can keep his armies together the offensive will flame along the British front and all our men will be involved in a life and death struggle. If his divisions are called away to help in that other battle these commanders of the German armies in the north may have to be content with mere holding actions, or with inactivity.

So in the north of this Western Front the British and German armies are both hungering for news of what is happening in Champagne, knowing that upon events there depend their own action in the immediate future. It is even possible that any French success between the Aisne and the Marne will hasten the offensive against the British front, and that instead of sending many men down south Rupprecht will strike with the object of keeping Allied troops away from that scene of action. Twenty-four hours more of history may decide which plans the German High Command thinks best, but to-day anyhow they must be thinking hard, filled with doubt and apprehension. They are playing all but their last cards as far as offensive action and initiative may carry them. They must do whatever they do within the next two months or so, and after that they will be for ever on the defensive, because their reserve power cannot maintain the same level as ours with the American legions behind us.

The fate of the world will be decided before the leaves turn brown on this year's trees, and perhaps before the harvest is gathered in. I believe that it will be decided in our favour.

JULY 23

BETWEEN the Marne and the Aisne the enemy is fighting desperately, and French and American troops are forcing in the sides of the salient and crushing him into a narrowing space.

Our British troops of the 51st, 15th, and 62nd Divisions slipped quietly away from our own front just before Foch

was ready to deliver his counter-blow. They are men who have fought in many of our great battles, and have won the highest honours of war. These English and Scottish battalions have already shattered some of his best divisions and made many prisoners. I saw some of them just before they left our front, saw them marching and manœuvring, looking fine and gallant men. I saw the Scottish boys of the 51st in their camps and billets and tramping down long roads between the bronzing wheat-fields, with their pipers leading them, as I passed their brothers the other day near Meteren, and their officers told me that these lads would make good soldiers in attack, and there was no need to be told, because they had the look of it. Three days ago they went into battle on ground unknown to them in that rugged country below Rheims, and these boys have beaten back the strongest German troops. They were set a hard task. The English and Scottish battalions were ordered to attack on the eastern side of the salient below Rheims, where the enemy had massed strong concentrations of men and guns for a break through to Epernay, and where at the time he was expecting French counter-attacks.

The Germans there were on high ground on each side of the valley of the Ardre, very rugged and wild, so that they were in strong defensive positions. Dense woods in full foliage, Rheims Wood, north of the river, and Courton Wood and King's Wood, south of the river, screened their movement and their guns to the south-west of Rheims. They had strong garrisons well forward in the towns of Marfaux, Bouilly, and St.-Euphraise, and other villages behind.

After several hours' bombardment of the German positions our battalions advanced upon the enemy. They were handicapped by a complete ignorance of the ground, except by a hurried study of maps, but the officers led them towards their objectives, and they went forward with short,

sharp rushes, with good discipline and high courage. South of the River Ardre the Scots of the 51st Division were rapid in advance, and swept round Courton Wood, and made a number of prisoners.

North of the river, English battalions of the 62nd Division advanced along the Rheims Wood to the small town of Marfaux, where they found themselves faced by heavy forces of Germans. They stormed the place with repeated efforts to capture it, in spite of very murderous gun-fire which was flung over by German batteries of field-guns and heavies. They were unable to take the town on that day —the 20th—though they inflicted an immense number of casualties upon the defending troops and took prisoners from three German divisions.

The German Staff moved up their reserves with orders to hold Marfaux at all costs, and one division was from the fresh reserve of the Crown Prince. Nevertheless, on the following day the British troops made a good deal of progress, gradually breaking the resistance of the enemy and taking the villages of La Nappe and Bouilly, with considerable booty in machine-guns. They also recovered twelve French 75's which the enemy had captured in May last.

That day our men reached King's Wood, and since then the 51st and 62nd Divisions have pushed forward slowly but steadily through Marfaux and other places against strong and stubborn defenders and under severe fire. The prisoners they took on the first days of their fighting were entirely ignorant of the French counter-offensive on the west of their salient, forty miles or so away.

JULY 26

GRADUALLY, after the monstrous efforts of the enemy to smash us to pieces from the opening of his offensive on March 21, we are regaining power of the initiative, and it is now the Germans who have to withstand surprise attacks.

On a big scale they were mightily surprised by General Foch's counter-offensive, believing that he was still without reserves to put his own theories into practice, and on a smaller scale they were utterly surprised by the attack a few days ago between Moreuil and Montdidier. Our Tanks played a part in causing this surprise, in co-operation with the French infantry.

The French general in command called on our Tank headquarters, and explained his idea. He is a believer in Tanks, and said that if he could have the services of a score or so he could capture some important ground held by the enemy as a stepping-stone to Amiens, and round up many prisoners if luck helped a little. Our Tanks were ready for the adventure, and they were placed under the French command. They made their way behind the French lines, took cover until the moment of attack, and then advanced with the blue coats, who were mightily amused by these comrades in arms, marvelling at their method of manœuvre, and full of enthusiasm for the gallantry of their crews. The German lines were stormed, and the Tanks and French infantry penetrated the enemy positions and assaulted the German machine-gun posts, strong points, and wired defences, cutting off groups of men, who surrendered quickly, and overwhelming those who held out in defence. As modern Juggernauts, they crushed the bodies of men who tried to bar their way, and when some of them got hit by gun-fire and were brought to a standstill, the crews opened their steel doors, dragged out their machine-guns, and fought from the tops of the Tanks, using them as strong points. Some of them were hit by guns across the River Avre, but the casualties of the Tank pilots and crews were light, and their co-operation stirred the French infantry to the highest enthusiasm. When they came back out of the battle they were hung around with French flags like chariots of victory. This admiration was mutual, for our men are loud in praise of the French troops

who fought with them, and say that they have never seen better things than the quickness, skill, and courage of attack shown by their comrades in blue. Among the prisoners brought home between Mailly, Raineval, and Sauvillers were four battalion commanders, who were both startled and depressed by this sudden turn of fortune's wheel.

PART VI

THE BRITISH VICTORIES

I

A General Advance

The swift and far-reaching success of Marshal Foch's counter-offensive across the Marne led quickly to the possibility of a British advance north and south of Amiens. The problem of Prince Rupprecht of Bavaria had been solved for him. The plight of the German Crown Prince, who had lost enormous numbers of men and guns, caused Lüdendorff to call for many of the twenty-nine divisions who had been in Rupprecht's reserve, waiting to assault us, and one by one they were hurried down to that seething cauldron between the Aisne and the Marne. Against our front there were no longer such great odds in manpower, and in the battles that opened on August 8 the enemy was hard pressed to support and relieve fighting troops. As I have written in my Preface, the Australians had the honour and the peril of initiating the attack after their skilful operations round Amiens which had not been without inevitable losses, and on Thursday, August 8, a famous day in history, they began their advance along the valley of the Somme. South of them was the Canadian corps north of the long road from Amiens to Roye. Being absent on sick leave I missed, by bad luck, the opening of this new phase in the war, when at last after many years of battle behind fixed positions, and then a retreat which was full of tragic peril, our armies went forward in an un-

broken success which changed the whole aspect of the Western Front. On that day in August, moving out of the early morning mists, there went many hundreds of Tanks in line of battle, followed by columns of Australian and Canadian infantry, battalion after battalion, with their supporting troops marching in depth, and an immense traffic of guns and gun-limbers, transport wagons and lorry columns, while masses of cavalry, a great pageant of horsemen, gathered in woods and sunken roads to ride out through the German lines when they should be broken by the Tanks. It was, as I have been told by officers who were there that day, the most astonishing drama of open warfare ever seen as yet on the Western Front, almost unbelievable to those who had known the years of trench warfare, when the mere thought of seeing large bodies of cavalry in action and men advancing in the open mile after mile, and horse artillery pursuing the enemy at the gallop, would have been checked by dread of insane visions.

The Australians did not have an easy time in breaking the enemy's defences on the Somme, and there was hard fighting for the village of Morlancourt, and later for Chipilly and Clery. But on the first day of fighting over 15,000 prisoners were gathered in, and on the south of the Somme, not many days later, the Australians swept forward through the ruins of Proyart, Framerville, Rosières, and Lihons, where they established their line on Saturday morning.

The Canadians went forward with rapid strides despite the difficulty presented by the Avre, which crossed diagonally the front of their right division, smashing through the German defences held by deadly machine-gun fire, and took Warvillers, Beaufort, Bouchoir, and Le Quesnoy, along the highway from Amiens to Roye. Further south the French in a brilliant attack had captured Moreuil, and then advanced so rapidly that the enemy was forced to evacuate Montdidier, where his narrow salient had become untenable. Our cavalry co-operated with the infantry,

riding out on patrols, rounding up prisoners and guns, and taking frightful risks against hidden machine-gun nests, as when they charged Z Wood, near Roye, where they came up against barbed-wire entanglements, and rode under a dreadful sweep of fire. One squadron captured a train full of soldiers returning from leave to the number of three or four hundred, after outflanking the village of Harbonnières and capturing Vauvillers. They then advanced further east and captured three batteries. There, by bad luck, they had to withdraw and leave the batteries behind because of machine-gun fire directed by an Austrian general, but their brigade brought in 1100 prisoners, and many Russian ponies. The village of Damery, near Roye, was taken by the Canadians, Z Wood fell to the French, and Roye itself was entered, the enemy falling back steadily before the French over a wide tract of country towards their old Hindenburg line beyond Nesle and Noyon. The Australians continued to force their way along the Somme to the outskirts of Péronne, where the enemy held the crossings at Biache and Brie, but meanwhile on August 23 the second great advance of British troops began.

Our whole line moved across the Ancre, and as far north as the country about Bucquoy and Puisieux. It was the march-back of our troops across the old Somme battlefields over which they had retreated in March under overwhelming pressure. The crossing of the Ancre by the 17th and 38th Divisions, English and Welsh, was a daring and astounding feat. The enemy was above them on the heights of Thiepval and Usna Hill, and his guns fired fiercely on the foot-bridges which our men tried to build across the foul swamp which runs through the most frightful track of old strife and wreckage and corruption in all our scenery of war from the ruins of Albert to the valley of death by Miraumont. One battalion of Welshmen and a force of the 17th Division waded at night through the cold water, up to their necks in it, and after assembling on the other side in darkness attacked in advance of their bar-

rage-fire upon the German positions high above them on chalky slopes like steep crags. They turned the German positions and broke the barrier which barred the way then, as on July 1, 1916, when many of our men died in their attempts to storm it, and by bad luck failed.

The Welsh on the left, the 17th in the centre, and the 21st Division on the right, starting from this line of the Ancre, went forward day after day, in unbroken progress, to Gauche Wood and Villers-Guislan, and the edge of our old Cambrai salient, more than twenty miles away, fighting hard all the time against desperate resistance by German rear-guards and many German counter-attacks. The enemy was fighting a rear-guard action, but with strong forces, and with the intention of delaying our progress at all costs until he could prepare his main defences on the Hindenburg line. So East and West Yorks, and Dorsets, and Lincolns of the 17th Division fought their way over the Pozières Ridge, through Courcellette and Martinpuich, scenes of tragic fighting in the old days of the first Somme battles, stormed Flers, which was hard and costly to take, and surrounded Le Transloy, where the enemy had an extraordinary number of machine-guns in the cemetery. The Welshmen of the 38th Division were keeping pace, and sometimes setting the pace, and on the right the 21st Division, the old heroes of Fricourt, and many battles from Flanders to the Somme, with their Yorkshires, Leicesters, Wiltshires, and other county troops, advanced south of Le Transloy towards their old front of March 21 at Vaucellete Farm. Further north, towards Bapaume, the New Zealanders were on the move and never stood still until they were through that town and far beyond it. All along this northern way there was hard fighting, and our English divisions fought many small battles on each side of the New Zealanders. There was the 42nd Division of ours —all Lancashire battalions—on the right of the New Zealanders, who had some ugly hours at Beauregard Dovecot, and later near Grevillers and Biefvillers, through which

the New Zealanders stormed their way, and at Riencourt, south of Bapaume. On the left was our old 5th Division with their glorious Devons, and Cornwall Light Infantry and South Country fellows with Scottish Borderers, and they helped bravely in the capture of Achiet-le-Grand—a machine-gun fortress then—and worked round Irles and Beugnatre, and went on again to the Bapaume-Cambrai road. The 37th Division with Bedfords and Warwicks, East Lancs, West Lancs, and the York and Lancs, took Bucquoy and Ablainzeville, and were swept with machine-gun fire outside the sugar factory at Bihucourt, and did not have an easy way past Behagnies and Sapignies, where the Germans fought like wolves among the ruins. But never for more than a night or a morning did the Germans hold back that human tide of ours which moved against them and broke down all their barriers and engulfed large numbers of their men.

II

Outside Arras

August 28

Our troops have again advanced since yesterday morning on many parts of the Front from country north of the Scarpe beyond Arras to the ruined villages north and south of Bapaume, and right across the old battlefields of the Somme to those woods of evil but heroic memory, Trones and Bernafay, and High Wood and Vaux, in the bend of the Somme, for which thousands of our men fought and died in the early years of this war. Thank God, thousands of our men are not dying now to take them again, but are going forward with amazing ease in wide sweeping movements which the enemy in most places is resisting only feebly, and it is only here and there that there has been close and bitter fighting. By bad luck and ill-health I have

been away from this front for a few weeks, and now that I have come back again it is startling to find what a change has taken place in so short a time.

When I left, all that one could say in good hope was that the enormous menace against us had been rebuffed, and that Marshal Foch's counter-stroke across the Marne and between Rheims and Soissons with French, British, and American troops had destroyed the ambition and power of the Crown Prince's army. It was then Prince Rupprecht's army that was the chief threat against us, and it was an army of perhaps 250,000 fresh troops, apart from those in line waiting to be hurled against us, if the German Crown Prince could do without them. We knew then that some of Rupprecht's divisions had been sent down hurriedly to his relief, but the question still remained whether the armies holding our part of the battle-front would be still strong enough to attack us or strong enough to check any attempt of ours to advance against them.

Since then the tide has turned in an astonishing way. It is now the enemy who is on the defensive, dreading the hammer-blows that fall upon him day after day, and the initiative of attack is so completely in our hands that we are able to strike him at many different places. Since August 8 we must have taken nearly 50,000 prisoners and nearly 500 guns, and the tale is not yet told, because our men are going on taking new strides, new batches of Germans, more batteries. The change has been greater in the minds of men than in the taking of territory. On our side our army seems to be buoyed up with enormous hope of getting on with this business quickly. They are fighting for quick victory and quick peace, so that they may get back to normal life and wipe this thing clean from the map of Europe, and restore the world to sane purposes. That is, I am sure, their hope, and for almost the first time in very truth they see something of the reality in sight.

But the change is also in the enemy's mind. Those German soldiers and their officers are changed men since March

21, when they launched their offensive. They no longer have even a dim hope of victory on this Western Front. All they hope for now is to defend themselves long enough to gain peace by negotiation. Many of the men go even further than this, and admit that they do not care how peace comes so long as there is peace. They are sullen with their own officers, and some of those whom I saw to-day were more than sullen. They were those captured to-day and yesterday by the Canadians in the country round Monchy, beyond Arras, nearly 2000 of them, and when those who had been first taken saw batches of their comrades coming down, they cheered and jeered and laughed, with shouts of "Bravo," as though they had gained the best of luck. They became excited when some of their officers were brought in, a battalion commander among them, with his adjutant, and the survivors of two battalion staffs, and they lounged up to the barbed wire of the enclosure which separated them with cigarettes hanging from their lips and no sign of discipline or deference. One of the officers was angry, and commanded the men to stand to attention when he spoke to them, but they shook their heads and grinned, as much as to say, "All that is finished. We have suffered too long under your tyranny. We are equal in captivity." And that was their meaning, judging from some of their speech to our officers and men. They complain that they have been deluded by hopes of victory, and have been sacrificed too often in the service of a brutal command.

Even the officers are changed in their demeanour, and speak gravely of their reverses, and do not seek to minimize them. Only one officer maintained the same truculent pride of his caste with the Canadian officers to-day. He refused to admit that anything serious had happened to the German army. Even when he was told how many prisoners had been taken lately, he said, "That is nothing. It is all according to plan." "Yes," said the Canadian officer, "but our plan, not yours." And at those words he

was abashed. I saw a batch of these prisoners coming down under escort of some Canadian mounted men this morning. They were marching briskly, staring about them as they passed, and smiling at our soldiers who were marching in the opposite direction to the battle-front. Many of them looked tired and pale, and some of them limped, and a few were lightly wounded, but there was on all their faces the look of men relieved from fear and glad to be beyond its menace. The men marching past them were Highlanders of the 51st Division going up to support their comrades fighting on the north of the Scarpe. They came winding through a little wood of shelled trees, and the colour of their kilts twinkled through the trees, and their brown faces were flushed with the heat of the march, and they had the look of boys who are sure of victory, so different from those poor pasty-faced fellows in grey who had just gone by as prisoners.

Well, it was queer to be back on the old familiar ground again, to be passing through Arras to get news of another battle at Monchy—through the old grey streets of Arras, with its ruined churches and broken houses, which hold a thousand memories of this war for us, because it was in April of last year that other English and Scottish troops passed that way towards Monchy and Guemappe and Pelves, which they attacked again yesterday and today. The Canadians were on the Vimy Ridge then. Yesterday some of them were up by Neuville-Vitasse and Wancourt, which London troops captured in the old days; and London troops are fighting near those places this time. The arrival of the Canadians was an immense surprise to the Germans. The last heard of them was outside Roye, after their glorious advance on the left of the French, and the last thing in the world which the enemy expected was to find them right in the north beyond Arras. That was a brilliant piece of secret manœuvre.

Before the Germans had any inkling of their presence the Canadians were advancing upon them yesterday morn-

ing with a sweep of shell-fire in front of them. Without encountering much resistance, they swung round by Guemappe and Wancourt over the high ground on each side of the Cojeul. The Germans of the 214th Division, made up of men from the Rhineland, Stettin, and Lower Schleswig, and Hessians, were aghast at this sudden assault, and either retired or gave themselves up in the early stages of the Canadian advance. Their resistance stiffened on the crest of Monchy Hill, and there was fierce fighting all night in the trench on the top of the Wancourt spur. But the Canadians were determined to get this place, and, with great individual gallantry and good leadership and a most dogged spirit, they worked around the machine-guns which were holding them off, and rushed them in the darkness. By morning they held the spur, and this body of Canadians, who had taken over 820 prisoners yesterday, this morning added another 150, with many machine-guns, most of whom were caught in the valley below the ridge. All told, the Canadians and the Scots attacking with them, had taken about 1800 prisoners. The highest point, most desired by the Canadians, was the old Wancourt Tower on the tip of the crest, and this they gained in time for a new departure this morning, having to change their direction three times owing to the lie of the ground, and facing south instead of east after the beginning of the battle, which is always a difficult operation. A little farther north other Canadian troops who had crossed Orange Hill, that hill which dominates many miles of country, so that the loss of it a few months ago was serious to us, advanced again this morning to woods on equally high ground beyond, for which our men strove many times in vain in May of last year. Those are the Bois-du-Sart and the Bois-de-Vert, which I used to see like green eyes staring down upon our lines round Wancourt and Henin, and from which always there used to come wicked machine-gun fire when any of our troops moved in the open valley below. The Canadians ap-

parently hold the Bois-du-Sart, and it seems likely that the other wood is in their hands, though I am not certain of this. In any case, they have moved steadily forward in that direction, and also below, across the Sensée Valley, towards the Drocourt-Quéant line, which is the northern switch of the main Hindenburg line between Wancourt and Héninel.

I was with the Canadians this morning when the new advance had just started, and over the wires came the good news that the Germans were falling back down their trenches towards Chérisy, and that their barrage of gun-fire was thin. The 35th German Division of West Prussians had relieved the 214th Division, and took part in the counter-attacks yesterday, but is already discouraged and giving ground. The 214th is practically destroyed as a fighting power. Prisoners have been taken from every company of every battalion, including, as I have said, a battalion commander and adjutant, and the survivors of two battalion staffs. The success of our infantry was most remarkable because in this battle very few Tanks have been used, and machine-gun nests had to be taken in many cases without their help. To the north of the Bois-du-Sart is one of the points of trouble because it is full of machine-guns, from which there is a wicked sweep of fire.

They were Scottish troops of the 51st Division, the heroes of so many battles, who, advancing on the north of the Canadians, stormed Roeux and its old chemical works, long laid into ruin, where in the first battles of Arras there was most bloody fighting week after week, in which Scottish troops also were engaged. In Roeux they took a number of prisoners who were dejected men. One of their officers confessed that he no longer took any interest in the war. "God is directing it," he said, "and will declare the issue." All the men long for peace by agreement. South of the Canadians Lowland Scots of the 52nd, and London troops of the 56th Division, yesterday worked

round Henin Hill, and fought forward towards Croisilles, which the enemy defends desperately. There was not much opposition on Henin Hill, and the Scots advanced in a leisurely way, so that our observers were filled with admiration for the cool courage of the men, who kept driving the enemy in front of them. Then they crossed the old end of the Hindenburg line this side of the Drocourt-Quéant switch, which is now the northern part of that line, and have been making further progress to-day.

The Londoners of the 56th Division fought with the utmost gallantry on the western edge of Croisilles, where for a time they were checked by the blast of machine-gun fire from the crest. Further south other troops, including Yorkshire battalions of the 62nd Division, are extending our gains north of Bapaume, by Beugnatre, and the sugar factory at Vaulx-Vraucourt, in the direction of Bullecourt. In that region the enemy is fighting hard, with strong counter-attacks, in which some of our men have had heavy fire to face, though general success has been assured. New Zealanders are forcing their way round the northern outskirts of Bapaume. Down south the Australians and other troops are steadily making their way across the Somme battlefields, through the old woods of ill-fame, like Bernafay and Trones and Maricourt, and our line is now nearly straight up from near Vaux on the Somme, to near Longueval and the southern outskirts of Bapaume.

The Germans can make no stand in most of these places, and they know it. Personally, I believe they are only fighting for time—hard rear-guard actions to gain a few days and exact the price before they fall back on their old line of resistance on the other side of Péronne. For them this retreat, which has completely wiped out their monstrous efforts which followed March 21, is a deadly blow to their military and national pride, and a proof that they will never gain a victory on the Western Front. They cannot hide this from the world nor from their own people. But do not let all this good success of ours lead us to a false

optimism and hopes beyond the touch of reality. Unless the spirit of the German army breaks more utterly than it has done, we yet may find, in spite of what I have written about the prisoners to-day, that they still have strength for a long and stubborn defence, and there must be many battles yet, more efforts by our men, long and stubborn patience on our part before the German High Command will utter the word "surrender" or "defeat." Yet, while we face that frankly, nothing can be more wonderful or glorious than the victories which have been won by the valour of our men during recent days, which have broken the evil purpose of the German command, and given us a wide margin of safety from dangers which touched us very close.

August 29

When I went up into the battle area this morning south-east of Arras, the enemy was shelling Monchy and the high ground beyond, and his long-range crumps burst and left black trails of smoke in the wet air, like those from a factory chimney. Beyond, along the Wancourt Ridge, it seemed very quiet, and when I travelled southwards past the line of Mercatel and Neuville-Vitasse, which are now in our hands again, after brief possession by the enemy, no single shell came over the Croisilles Ridge, which overlooks the village of Croisilles, which was entered by London troops of the 56th Division yesterday, and over to Bullecourt, upon which they advanced to-day.

I was with officers of these troops when the attack was renewed at half-past twelve this morning. We were standing amidst the wreckage of old trenches and huts left behind in the wake of all this fighting, when a hurricane bombardment opened from all our guns. Our batteries were scattered about over a wide area, which includes the newly captured villages of Boiry-Becquerelle and Boyelles, and many heaps of ruin, which were once hamlets and farmsteads and cottages, all smashed to bits, and groups of

Nissen huts broken to matchwood, and twisted iron and railway lines flung wildly over the fields, and the indescribable litter of this fighting zone. It had been raining hard, and the sky was heavy with storm-clouds, beneath which along the crests of high ground the sun shone with a white, gleaming light. It sparkled on the rain-washed ruins, with their white chalk, and upon the waterproof capes of men marching along the tracks behind the lines, and upon field-batteries moving forward with their transport.

Suddenly at this hour of half-past twelve a quietude which had only been broken by the shocks of single long-range guns firing over the ridge to Bullecourt, was changed into a tumult of noise as all our batteries began a terrific drumfire. For several miles the wreckage of the battle-fields was alive with little points of light flashing through the wet mist, running along the ridges like sparks setting the rank grass alight. It was an intense bombardment preceding a new attack by Londoners and the Guards, with Lowlanders of the 52nd Division on their right, beyond Croisilles and Fontaine-les-Croisilles towards Bullecourt and the Drocourt-Quéant line. Officers directing these operations told me that Croisilles had been well in their hands since yesterday, and that, with the help of the Scots to the north of them, they hoped to get a good deal farther today now that Croisilles was no longer a furnace of machine-gun fire. One of the officers at that moment was called to the telephone in touch with his forward observers, and after listening to the message, he turned and said, "It seems to have started all right. Our observers have seen Germans running out of Bullecourt. We ought to get the place in a couple of hours."

These troops of the 56th (London) Division have done most gallantly since they came into this battle on August 23. The London Scottish, 4th Londons, and Kensingtons had eight hours' march over rough ground, and went straight into the attack against Boyelles and Boiry-

Becquerelle, which they captured easily with 700 prisoners. Another battalion commander went out afterwards to ascertain the enemy's position, which is never very certain, and escaped narrowly after being machine-gunned at short range from one bit of trench to another. These lads were very tired after three nights without sleep, and with little water, and they had hard fighting on the way to Croisilles, and a worse time afterwards outside the village, where they found themselves under an incessant sweep of machine-gun bullets from the village, which was crammed with German machine-gunners. They tried to rush the place several times, but were checked by that infernal fire. Other bodies of them, including the 1st Londons, Middlesex, and 8th Londoners, got up towards the Hindenburg line, helped by Londoners on their left, who came round to the north of Croisilles and through the Hindenburg line yesterday, threatening to encircle the village. Germans in Croisilles saw this menace, and their machine-gun teams filtered out of it under our gun-fire, which killed many of them before they could escape. Yesterday one of our officers mounted his horse and rode very calmly and quietly into that stronghold and found it deserted, so that it was then occupied by our men.

Two platoons of these Londoners had a queer and hazardous adventure on the way up at a place called Fooley Trench. They found they had plunged into a hornets' nest, with machine-guns on each side of them, and a special smoke barrage had to be put up for them, so that they could get back behind its veil. "They were as good as the Guards," said some of the Guards themselves on the morning of the recent attack, and that is praise worth having from men who have a fine pride in themselves. Their officers cannot say too much in admiration of these boys, who, after long and hard fighting in earlier battles, have gone forward again with such high spirit and patient courage and grim sticking power.

Their capture of Croisilles is of big importance to our

general scheme of things, opening the way to the further advance on Bullecourt. It forces the enemy back on to the Drocourt-Quéant line, which he will hold for a time if he can with a kind of outer bastion of trenches swinging in a loop, which leaves Bullecourt on our side of it. The situation yesterday remained in our favour, in spite of the desperate efforts of the enemy to beat us back and retake some of his lost ground, like Monchy.

Highlanders of the 51st Division north of the Scarpe had held on to Roeux, with its famous and horrible ruin of chemical works just beyond them, and south of the river we were on the Wancourt Ridge, well east of Monchy Hill, and 300 yards or so west of the high wood called Bois-de-Sart. The Canadians the day before yesterday had made a general advance of 6000 yards, with the capture of 2000 prisoners and about 50 guns. All this had frightened the enemy command, and they made frantic efforts to stiffen the resisting power of their lines. Owing to the rapidity of our advance and their heavy losses, they had great difficulty in reinforcing their defence. They had to goad up divisions and bits of divisions already cut to pieces in the recent fighting, and odd battalions and companies are mixed together in a chaotic way and told to go forward and fight. The German bandsmen and transport drivers were given rifles and sent into the front lines, with orders to stand or die. In an area of three miles there were sixteen battalions made up from five shattered divisions, and hopelessly mixed round about Montauban.

Farther north, by Mory and Chérisy, the 36th German Division and the 23rd, both divisions of storm troops, have been so smashed that another division, which had been already in bloody fighting so that many companies were down to twenty-five men instead of 120, had to be sent up in their support. Before their counter-attack on the Guards at Mory on August 22 the Seventeenth German Army issued a boasting order which said: "We have completely defeated four and a half British divisions, and,

what is more, they know it." Four of their divisions were ordered forward to counter-attack and retake Moyenneville and Ablainzeville, but only a few men got to the railway, and there were many non-starters, as our men say. Those who did attempt to advance were caught by our artillery and slaughtered. One battalion near St.-Leger found that the regiments on the right and left of them had "mizzled" off, and it was stranded. Our troops saw the situation of these men and surrounded them so that they were forced to surrender in a mass to the number of 215. A company commander of the 73rd Fusiliers, whose nose seems to have been broken by his own men, was furious at having been sent into the firing-line after the dreadful slaughter of his regiment, and cursed his command in strong language. Prisoners also complained of their artillery firing as much as 600 yards short and so killing their own men.

Two new German divisions were brought up against the Canadians yesterday, and the 35th, which had been manning the Drocourt-Quéant line, was ordered to go forward at seven o'clock last night and retake Monchy, that high old hill which I saw this morning under fire, but still securely in our hands. Again there were many non-starters. By the results of this attempted attack one can picture truly enough the sullen revolt of dispirited men. Some units came forward under the sweep of our gun-fire, enormously stronger than theirs in this part of the line, and fell under it on those slopes of death. A few resolute bodies of men made as much as 400 yards of ground, and there stayed, being wiped out man by man. Once again the 35th German Division was ordered to advance on Monchy, but after a disorganized effort of the bravest men they drifted back.

For a time at any rate the German infantry, apart from the machine-gunners who were still most gallant and resolute, have lost their spirit, and have had enough of this rear-guard fighting and counter-attacking in weak strength.

A rot has begun among them which will lead to greater disasters for the German army unless they can be rallied and refreshed. Our men will not give them any holiday or help them with a rest-cure. Between the Oise and the sea the German Command has not many divisions fit to fight, apart from those dreadfully hammered and tried beyond the breaking point of human courage. They must be at their wits' end, thinking hard in vain what they may do next. We ourselves were in no good state after the weeks following March 21. As I described at the time, our men had to fight again and again until terribly tired and weak, but reserves came to us in time, and are here with us now.

But the Germans have at the moment no such reserves, and they know that the American Army is waiting for them, large legions of fresh fighting men ready to strike at the right moment. For Hindenburg and Lüdendorff these are not good days. English, Scottish, and Canadian troops have made black marks for them yesterday and today. At ten o'clock yesterday morning the Canadians attacked, and, after hard fighting, took Chérisy, and then in the afternoon went forward again in a big sweep and captured Vis-en-Artois. The Germans blew up the bridge across the Cojeul river, but it did not stop the Canadians. Vis-en-Artois, like Croisilles, was stiff with machine-guns, and the fields were swept with bullets from the cemetery trench, and another outside the village. But with rifle and bayonet and machine-gun, the Canadian storming parties broke this defence, divided the village between two separate units of their force, and sent out patrols to Remy-Haucourt and Boiry-Notre-Dame, which are far out in the open country, beyond any point we have reached in this region during the whole war.

Meanwhile, on the north of the Scarpe our Scottish troops of the 51st Division have gone forward from Roeux and captured Pelves, and our whole line from the north of the Scarpe to the country below Croisilles is moving for-

ward to-day, driving the enemy in front of it. Scottish troops took Fontaine-les-Croisilles, and with the English troops are going well ahead. Undoubtedly this move will be checked for a time in front of the Drocourt-Quéant line, which is very strong, and will be defended in strength by every German regiment which can be brought up. This advance of ours gives a sense and sight of enormous movement behind our lines, and there is not a man who is not stirred by the emotion of it, feeling that we are indeed "getting on with the war." It is like a vast tide of life, moving very slowly but steadily. Up the roads our transport goes with ammunition and food and water for the fighting-lines, miles and miles of moving columns, with "Ole Bill" and his mates smoking their fags above the horses, with their dogs on the baggage behind, and side glances of scorn at odd crumps that kick up the earth in the fields about them. Engineers are working in an heroic way, laying new lines, mending old ones torn up by the enemy in his retreat, building up bridges that have been wrecked by explosive charges or our fire.

At Pozières and elsewhere we have regained many of our old ammunition dumps, with valuable stores, which will come into use again. Everywhere over our old ground, now recaptured, there are clumps of British shells, and the earth is littered with them, lying in piles and gleaming in the rain and sun. So fast have the engineers worked that trains are now puffing up into places taken only a few days ago, and this morning I saw how all our pioneers and railwaymen and labour battalions, like an enormous army of ants, were working on these old battlefields to make a little order out of chaos and get on with the war, like the riflemen who are walking in front of them. Life is resumed in the fields and villages, which for some months have been places of great death.

Things are going well, but, good or ill, the British soldier remains the same as I saw him to-day in those places

—imperturbable, industrious, glad to get any comfort man may find amidst ruin, and doing his job, whatever it may be, without worry if there is no immediate cause to have the "wind up."

III

Back to Bapaume

August 30

Bapaume has been taken to-day, and from the hills north of the Scarpe, beyond Arras, right away down the line across the old Somme battlefields, by Ginchy and Guillemont and Morval, where our troops are pressing forward, and, farther south still, in the Australian fighting zone, by Feuillères and Belloy, above the Somme, this side of Péronne, the enemy is retreating before us, and his men are trying to get away behind their rear-guards before they are caught or killed. In places German machine-gunners and rear-guard lines are maintaining fierce resistance, in order to gain time for the more orderly retreat of the German divisions, and this defence has been strongest on the northern half of the Australian front, perhaps to delay the capture of Péronne until they may have time to remove their enormous stores, and higher up on our First and Third Army fronts, from Bapaume and Bullecourt to north of the Arras-Cambrai road.

But the German army is stealing away in the darkness and daylight from all the country west of the Somme, and from the battlefields beyond Delville Wood above, and our men are trudging after them, kept up by elation of the victorious advance which is better than wine to them. Because many of these men, who are now following up the Germans in big strides, are the same men who in March last had to fall back over this same ground under overwhelming odds, and the change of fortune is balm to their spirit, and every yard of the way is a splendid revenge.

Because they have the enemy on the run they are eager to go on till they can walk no further, and officers and men, like many I met to-day, are high-spirited, full of odd jokes and laughter, excited a little beyond the reserve and quietude of our English way, because Fritz is still "hopping it," as they say, and every hour brings them news of more villages recaptured, more woods from which the Germans have fled, more ground gained on the right or left.

So I found the Australians this morning, and in another place some Welsh officers of the 58th Division, who had been moving forward day after day, until they were miles away from where they started, and far out in the wilderness of the Somme battlefields. "The old dragon," said one of the officers of the Welsh troops, "has his tail sticking up as straight as a crowbar, and the Welsh lads have a right to be proud of themselves, because since the 23rd, when they attacked across the Ancre, they have captured place after place, thousands of prisoners, smashed through the enemy every time he has tried to stand, and scared him out of his wits." With English troops on their right and left, it was the Welsh who waded the Ancre up to their necks, and, with our barrage falling behind them, because they had gone too far, attacked and took the heights of Usna Hill at the bayonet-point, and afterwards helped to storm the fortress position of Thiepval, which broke the enemy's main line of resistance; and then, with other troops, swept across the Pozières Ridge, and Contalmaison, and La Boiselle, and Ovillers, through Mametz Wood and beyond to Bazentin-le-Grand. "Mametz Wood, captured by Welsh, 1916, recaptured 1918. Hurrah!" was the wire sent to headquarters when the Welsh gained the wood on August 25. This morning they captured Delville Wood, the old "Devil's Wood," which made a black chapter of history in 1916; and then went on to Ginchy, and away towards Morval, with other English troops on their right through Guillemont. We had Delville Wood for a time a day or two ago, and then fell back from it the day before yesterday under

fierce shelling; but it was ours this morning, as I saw for myself when I went up to it, and then took a field track towards Ginchy.

We turned our heavies on to it in the night, and flung 8-inch shells along its dead trees, so that the enemy fled from it in terror. Three men did not escape, but slept stolidly like dead men through all our gun-fire, until wakened up this morning when the Welshmen went in. I saw them coming down the road from Longueval under escort, three white-faced fellows, who still looked drugged by sleep, but smiled sheepishly as they passed. I have had many strange and thrilling experiences on battlefields of the Somme, from the time when our men fought yard by yard in 1916, so that every fold of the ground was the arena of a new battle, and every clump of shelled trees, every ditch, every mound and heap of ruin was the scene of some terrible episode, until a few days after March 21, when I saw our men coming back across Pozières Ridge with the enemy in close pursuit, and German shells falling in the old places which for a year had been immune from fire.

But to-day many of those old emotions were eclipsed by the glad sense of being able to go once more up the Albert-Bapaume road, past La Boiselle and through Contalmaison to the ridge at Longueval and Delville Wood, with the wonderful feeling that once again some foul spell had lifted from these fields, and that there was room to roam in them again—these places that are ours by the heroic valour of our men, now that the enemy has been driven back to his vanishing line of retreat.

To us who have followed this war in body and in spirit, those upheaved and mangled fields are sacred ground, strewn with the graves of our men who fell there. Their graves are there still, as I saw to-day, with the white crosses that were put up to them still standing above the turmoil of earth. The enemy has not touched them, and our own shell-fire has not destroyed them, not many of them, as far as I could see, and the only difference since the

enemy sprawled back here, and stayed a little while, and then was flung back again, is that many bodies of grey-clad men lie among the shell-craters, and that the roads and tracks are littered with dead horses, so that the air is pestilential with foul odour, and everywhere among the old trenches and the new, with their white upturned chalk and litter of barbed wire, are fresh German notice-boards, pointing the way to firing-lines and observation posts, and giving the direction of tracks—"Nach Mametz," "Nach Longueval," "Nach Ginchy." They had tried to camouflage some of their tracks by screens made of rushes, and they had dug deep shelters under the banks and in old trenches, in order to escape from our harassing fire. In shell-craters and ditches lie their helmets and gas-masks and rifles and equipment, and here and there is the wreckage of a field-gun or a limber untouched, but abandoned in their flight, and strewn over all the ground are vast numbers of unexploded shells.

This morning, on the Somme battlefields, our batteries were in action far forward, having been brought up in the night by unresting gunners, and others were getting into their positions in places which yesterday were in German hands. Gunner officers rode their horses on their way to find good emplacements for heavies or field-guns, along tracks where it would have been death to ride even this morning, and they called out cheery greetings to infantry officers who were going up on foot. There was some scattered but feeble shelling round about Martinpuich and over by Morval, but for the most part the German guns were silent, trekking away to safety, and it was our artillery that made all the noise of battle. The long snouts of 6-inch guns that had been brought up somehow by the spirit and strength of men and horses, tired, but eager to get ahead, rose slowly, like monsters yawning, and bellowed out their menace to the retreating Germans. Field-guns hammered out their shots, and spent their shells almost as fast as ammunition could be brought up by the transport columns,

who find it hard to follow so quickly, but never fail. Road-menders were already at work, the gallant pioneers who make the ways straight, and truly it is surprising how good our old roads are, after all the stress of advance and retreat.

I took my car to-day to the edge of Longueval and broke no springs, and could have driven into the German lines without any trouble except the inevitable one which ends all trouble. The storm-clouds of yesterday had cleared, and the sky was blue between snow mountains, and over the Somme battlefields there was a golden light, which glinted on the trunks of the black dead trees in Devil's Wood and Mametz Wood, and those thin rows of charred masts which were once Trones Wood and Bernafay, where many of our men fought and fell two years ago. The open battlefield stretched away as far as one's vision, and across it our men went trudging, with the Germans creeping away before them, or holding a line with machine-gun fire, until our men were on them and through them. Our casualties still remain light, but here and there men fall, caught by those bullets from the German rear-guards, as I saw how some of them, walking in single file, had been caught this morning down one track. They lay there, with their steel hats lying beside them, at intervals of a dozen paces. For them there was peace and the journey's end. But by good luck most of our wounded are slightly touched, for machine-gun bullets are cleaner than chunks of shell, and the ambulances that stole down the winding tracks, with the sun deepening the redness of their crosses, were bearing men who have "Blighty" wounds, and will soon be well. They were smoking cigarettes as they lay and grinned through the flaps behind, and there were not many this morning in my direction who lay still and unconscious under their blankets. For this last lap of the German retreat from Ginchy and Guillemont has been a stampede without fighting, and our men have followed up like shepherds rounding up their sheep.

Elsewhere the fighting has been severe. Last night there

were two counter-attacks against the Canadians in the neighbourhood of Artillery Hill, between Boiry and Jig-Saw Wood. The German Command must have hated the loss of Jig-Saw Wood and Sart Wood, which were taken yesterday and the day before. They used the cover of this chain of woods on the high ground beyond Monchy and above Wancourt in order to bring their men up and feed their lines. The loss of them is a grave blow, and they tried to goad their men to get back to them yesterday. Elements of four divisions were put into counter-attacks, including units of the 35th Division, which is utterly smashed, but they failed to make any ground and were broken under our fire.

The attack which I described yesterday when Londoners took Croisilles was successful all along the line, and the troops of the First Army in the north are within 2000 yards of the Drocourt-Quéant line, having broken through all the German rear-guards between them and that line of resistance, which the enemy hopes to keep at all costs. North of the Scarpe the 51st Highland Division has taken Greenland Hill, only half of which they held previously, and have got well beyond Pelves. It is the same old 51st which, since March 21, has fought continuously along many parts of the Front, first in the Cambrai salient, with dogged rear-guard actions against enormous odds, then up by Béthune, when the enemy launched his northern attack, then down with the French in the great battles which ended with the German retreat on the Marne, and now most gloriously in these new victories, through Rœux and Pelves. They have received new drafts of gallant young Scots, whom I have described marching up to battle with a swing of kilts and a warrior look in their eyes, and such a gallantry of youth that one's heart beats at the sight of them. They have gained great honour, not only in our own Army, but among the French, and even in the enemy's armies, and it will never be forgotten as long as history is written. It is the division to which the Germans sent a message,

saying, "Poor old 51st, still sticking it." They are doing more than sticking it now. They are driving the enemy before them and taking many prisoners, and breaking the German spirit.

For the time being it is badly broken among the infantry, though their machine-gunners are still wonderful. An officer of the 214th Division says his men would not fight at all. He shot ten of them and then, finding things hopeless, surrendered himself. When his men heard that Canadians were in front of them they were seized with panic, he says, and nothing could rally them. Since the 23rd London troops have been fighting big battles and making astounding progress. They are the troops whose actions I described yesterday. It was they who stormed through Boyelles and Boiry-Becquerelle, taking 700 prisoners on the way to Croisilles, where some of them had to face a terrible fire from massed machine-guns. With Scottish troops they broke the Hindenburg line across the Sensée Valley, and yesterday morning captured Croisilles and went half-way to Bullecourt.

It was a brigade major of Londoners who rode very calmly into Croisilles and established himself there in advance of his men, and throughout this week the young Londoners, who in April last helped to break the German assaults at Arras, by the most exalted courage, have again been fighting with hearts that have never failed, though some of them have suffered from the agony of sleeplessness and lain in wet ditches under the sweep of machine-gun bullets. Good old London Town, which has produced boys like this from the little houses in the suburbs, where quiet families who made their sons "something in the City" never thought that a hero was sitting down to table with them, or that their boy would ever lie out in a ditch under dreadful fire. There have been great soldiers from London, and many of them, fighting under the dagger and the motto of "Domine dirige nos."

Our men are marvellous. Highlanders or Cockneys,

Welsh or South Country, Lancashire or Yorkshire, during the last three weeks they have defeated the storm divisions of the German army, wiped out all the enemy's gains since March 21, from Amiens to Bapaume, and from Arras to the Somme, and have for ever destroyed all Germany's hopes of victory. By the strength of their souls they have done this, and by the risk of their bodies, and by the last limit of human pluck, fighting most of all against fatigue and the desire to sleep, more terrible this time than the enemy ahead.

AUGUST 31

THE official *communiqué* tells the places we have captured to-day and last night—so many that a mere list of them is long—from north of the Scarpe, where Scotsmen are on the outskirts of Plouvain, after their long and gallant fighting, to Bullecourt, which Londoners of the 56th and West Lancashires of the 57th Division took yesterday, going farther east to-day than we have ever been before, and away down south beyond Bapaume and towards Péronne. In the First Army, Canadians, following up yesterday's splendid attack by Londoners, have made a new assault to-day, and are within a few hundred yards of the Drocourt-Quéant line, and in the Third Army the New Zealanders and other troops are getting out into open country and on high ground to the north and east of Bapaume.

I picked some roses to-day in Bapaume, red rambler roses, which would make a garland for the steel helmet of one of the New Zealand boys, to whom honour is most due for the capture of the town. Bapaume is not a fragrant place for rose-lovers, and when I went into it early this morning, when the new battle was in progress outside, German shells were smashing among the houses, and there was a smell of corruption and high explosives in its ruined streets; but I noticed how against a broken wall these roses were in bloom, and marigolds and sweet williams among the red brickdust of the ruins, and I picked a bunch out of

sheer maudlin sentiment. For there is a sentiment about the recapture of Bapaume for all our soldiers and for me. It is the second time that we have entered it with triumph after stern fighting up a long, long trail. I shall never forget the thrill of that first entry on March 17 last year, when I had the luck to go in with the Australians up the long road from Albert, past Pozières and Le Sars and the Butte-de-Warlencourt, and those frightful places where thousands of our men had fallen on the way. It seemed then that Bapaume was the goal of victory, and, in spite of the dreadful sights about, one's spirit rose as one passed each shell-crater and drew nearer to the town. The repetition of an experience is never quite so fresh in sensation as the first adventure; yet to get again into Bapaume after its loss last March, when the German army came in a rolling tide back over the Somme battlefields, was a thing worth doing. It was another landmark of history, made this time by New Zealanders and English battalions of the 5th Division fighting beside them. I set out early to get there, and saw the dawn rise for this new day of war. The fields were pale in the first light of day, and there was a white mist over all the war-zone until it was soaked up by the rising sun.

The battlefields were ghastly in this whitish glamour, with dew clinging to the strands of the barbed wire and to tall thistles growing rankly in the unreaped cornfields all cut up with trenches and shell-craters. Supply trains puffed through the desolation of those old battlefields, with long trails of white smoke, and truck-loads of shells for new battles. Kite-balloons rose above the grey earth and wagged their white ears aloft. Presently along the roads transport came crawling. Labour battalions came out of their camps in which smoky fires burned, and marched up to mend the roads tramped over by German boots a day or two ago. From the aerodromes on the way our flying men were coming out for the first flight of the morning, and winged away into dappled sky. So the world out here awoke to an-

other day of war, though farther up there was no waking, for no man had slept. I went up through Miraumont and the valley of the Ancre, across which the Welsh went wading to capture the heights of Thiépval on August 8. It was a valley of abomination, and the dawn lighted up its leprous trees, sticking out of deep swamps from which there rose wafts of stench where dead things lie rotting. Sand-bag emplacements, where men had a little shelter from storms of fire, were white against the charred earth and black stumps. Everywhere for miles up this valley, to Irles and Achiet-le-Petit and Grevillers and other places near Bapaume, where our men have been fighting hard these last few days, the ground—all this tumult of tortured earth, all these pits dug by shells, all this wild destruction of places ruined in the first years of the war, and mangled ever since—was strewn with relics of German life and German death newly littered here. Their great steel helms, punctured by bullets, or torn like paper by shell-splinters, lay in thousands, with gas-masks and rifles and cartridge belts and grey coats. Every mile of the way lay rows of stick-bombs never used against our men, and dumps of unexploded shells hideous in their potentiality. A few dead horses lay on each side of the tracks as they had gone trudging up with our transport before being hit. Beside one horse lay a dead white dog, the pet of a transport column.

For a picture of war an artist like Orpen should have been here. But the men hereabouts had other work to do. They were getting on with the business, bringing up their guns across wild wastes of cratered ground, filling up pits in the roads for transport to pass, tearing up broken rails that new ones might be laid, riding and marching forward to support their comrades in another day of fighting. They were mostly New Zealanders on this way, and although bad stuff was flying about—the enemy was crumping Grevillers and Achiet-le-Petit, and scattering high velocities about in a vicious random way—many of these lads did

not trouble to wear their steel helmets, but kept to their slouch hats with the dandy red band. I poked my head into a tent to get some direction, and found a New Zealand officer just waking up from a too brief sleep. "How are things going?" I asked, and he said, "Oh, fine! Our boys have done grandly, and are still going ahead." He sat up to tell me some of their adventures; how they had fought machine-gun nests, how the Germans had counter-attacked a day or two ago, and got very near to their field-batteries, which were far forward. "What do you think?" he said. "Those gunners of ours fought at point-blank range until the Germans were nearly up to their muzzles, and took seven prisoners on their own, which is not in the artillery contract. They are deveilish amused with themselves, and have reason to be."

So I went on to Bapaume with quickened pulse, over trenches taken only yesterday, and still bristling with parts of German machine-guns, which were densely emplaced along the lines. New Zealanders were organizing their own defences in the old German trenches, oiling their rifles. They pointed out the best way into Bapaume, through belts of wire, and I went on across the railway, which I crossed first in March of 1917, on another day of victory. Bapaume had changed but little since I last saw it, before the German avalanche a few months ago. Since then our guns have pounded it, and our flying men have gone over it at night dropping down tons of explosives, and now this morning the enemy was shelling it again, but what difference can there be in a place already ruined, a scrap-heap of broken houses, except more holes in walls, broken roofs rebroken, brickwork smashed into smaller dust? I prowled about the streets of Bapaume, through gaping walls of houses, over piled wreckage, and found it the same old Bapaume as when I had left it, except that some of our huts and an officers' clubhouse and some Y.M.C.A. tents and shelters have been blown to bits, like everything else. This was the chief difference, except

again for many sign-boards showing the recent occupation of the enemy. One notice caught my eye, and I saw the same message of warning in Grevillers and Achiet, and other places near Bapaume, showing how effective had been the work of our airmen in terror to the German soldiers. It said: "Weg von der Strasse! Hier findet euch feindliche Flieger" ("Keep off the streets. Here you will find hostile airmen"). These notices were even in open country, down the battlefield tracks, telling how our airmen had swooped over them all with their constant menace.

Prowling about those sinister streets of Bapaume I met a fellow in a steel hat who had a valuable box of matches, which was good for a cigarette, and in friendly conversation he told me that before he became a rifleman of the New Zealanders he was the editor of a newspaper in his country, and a literary man. We exchanged views on the war and life and shell-fire amidst the ruins, and he told me how some days ago, when he was outside Puisieux with his platoon, they were badly troubled by a German machine-gun in front of them. The editor was one of six who went out to get rid of this trouble, if they had the luck, and they not only brought in the machine-gun, but twenty-six prisoners as well, being the first batch from Puisieux. It was another little experience for a man who was more ready with a fountain-pen than a rifle before the world went to war. In the streets of Bapaume I picked up a book dropped in a hurry by some poor devil who will never read it now. It is entitled "Der Quelle der Kraft, der Strom des Friedens, das Meer der Gnade"—"The Source of Power, the Flood of Peace, the Sea of Grace"—and I think when I have time I shall read it to find out another angle of German philosophy with regard to the war. It ought to make good reading, though not perhaps as the author intended.

At half-past eight this morning another action began outside Bapaume, and for half an hour or more our drum-fire was very fierce and heavy. I was amazed to find our guns so far forward, heavy guns as well as field-guns, but

all through the recent fighting the New Zealand gunners have been like greyhounds on the scent, and have followed their infantry with amazing speed and skill. The heavies were firing in a wide arc round Bapaume, and their shells came through the air with a ripping sound that almost lifted my hair through my steel helmet. Shell after shell of large calibre screamed overhead, and some of them had a high, gobbling noise as they spun at lightning speed, and the bellowing of the guns seemed to shake these old battle-fields and stir their troubled earth. The field-batteries within short range of the enemy were knock-knocking like postmen down London streets with double rat-tats, as children might dream of them at night. The New Zealanders and English troops of the 5th Division were attacking Fremicourt and the high ridge south-east of Bapaume overlooking Beugny, while Riencourt was being approached by Lancashire troops of the 42nd Division; and farther south our men were working towards Beaulencourt. Success in these attacks would give us the strongest defensive lines round Bapaume, and put the enemy into a perilous position. The New Zealanders have never been still since I went among them one month ago in Hebuterne and Rossignol Wood, when even then they were harrying the enemy out of his lines. Since then, after August 8 they have advanced twenty-one kilometres, and always, as one of their officers told me to-day, have been the leading hounds in the pack on the way to Bapaume. At the beginning of our advance they attacked Puisieux, and joined up on the right with English troops in the valley of Ancre, and with the Lancashires of the 42nd Division helped to take Beauregard dovecot, an important spot which the enemy defended desperately, so that there was hard fighting there. Three forward observing officers of the New Zealanders, very gallant fellows, took twenty-three prisoners unaided, and about 300 German birds were hauled out of the dovecot by their men. They then joined with our troops in the big attack on Bucquoy, Irles, and Achiet-

le-Grand, and afterwards captured Loupart Wood, which I saw this morning, as many times in old days, with its thin fringe of branchless trees staring away for miles over the Somme battlefields on the left side of the Albert-Bapaume road. Grevillers fell to them, Grevillers with its ruined church, through which the sunlight streamed to-day, and into which German shells came crumpling, and then, with English troops fighting most splendidly on their right, they flung a loop round Bapaume by the memorial outside, and the suburb of Favreuil. The taking of Beugnatre—"Bug Nature" as our men call it—by the English troops sealed the fate of Bapaume, and when the New Zealanders and their English comrades swung down north-east of the town almost to the railway, the enemy saw that his game was up in this part of the world and decided to quit. The New Zealand boys had no need to take it by storm. They entered fighting through the machine-gun posts outside and took possession of its streets, having only three casualties in the town itself.

That was yesterday, and to-day Bapaume is safely ours, with our men dribbling away over the heights beyond. Not many casualties have come back from this new battle. I saw some lightly wounded men here and there in advance dressing-stations fixed up in old ruined farmsteads behind our present lines, where the Red Cross flag floats over the broken walls or is thrust in the rafters of tileless roofs—little pictures of war which remain in one's heart as the stretchers are carried in and strong fellows help in their limping comrades as tenderly as women, while round about big shells are bursting from long-range guns. In all these places there were German wounded, and down the tracks from Bapaume came many German prisoners, captured a few hours ago in the new battle on the heights outside. They seemed to me a most wretched-looking lot of men, and I saw some hundreds of them newly caught. They had a dazed, senseless look, and were drooping and downcast like beaten animals. The worst-looking set of Germans I have

seen in recent days. And no wonder, for they must have had a dreadful and terrifying time, without rest from the pursuit of our men, and have been driven into the fight relentlessly by officers behind the lines.

The roses on my table, plucked in Bapaume, are a sweeter sight than the things that lie about the battlefields, but the sweetness of life to our soldiers is that their courage and their sacrifice have not been in vain. To-day, as on many recent days, they are reaping the fruits of victory from one end of the line to the other, and the whole British Army is moving forward with a great vision in front of it, the vision of the last victory which will end all this fighting. I hear that up in the north the enemy is drawing back near the Lys, and it is possible that our patrols are in Bailleul.

IV

Round Pêronne and Northwards

September 2

There is more good news to tell, and it is difficult for us war correspondents to keep pace with the advance of the troops in the different parts of the field. Good old Bailleul is in our hands again, but only as dust and ashes, for it is utterly destroyed, and the enemy is sneaking away from the country around, so that Kemmel Hill has been reached by our patrols. On the southern part of the fighting-line the Australians, who have advanced no fewer than twenty miles since the beginning of our attacking in August, have struck again, and this morning (Saturday) have, by most brilliant generalship and the fine gallantry of the men, seized Mont St.-Quentin, which dominates Péronne on the northern side, and with it have captured prisoners amounting to at least a thousand, as far as I can tell. There seemed more than that to me when I saw batches of them coming over the battlefields and down the tracks from the

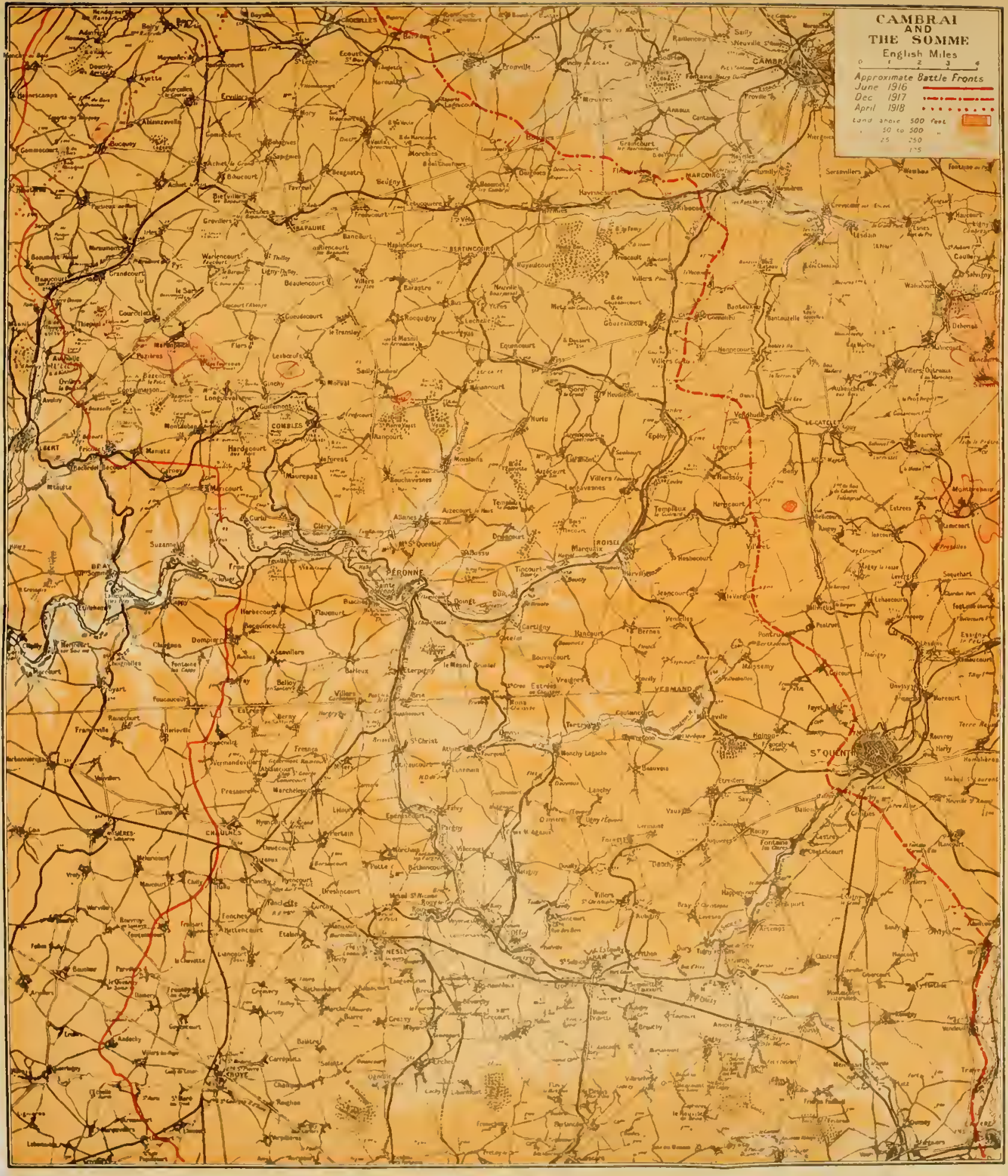
fighting-lines to-day when I went up to look at the progress of this advance. The first batch I saw certainly numbered 200, marching with their officers ahead under escort of mounted Australians. They came tramping through the tall thistles that have grown between the shell-craters and barbed wire and old trenches of that wild desolation which stretches on both sides of the Somme for many miles, strewn with the frightful ruins of villages, black and fretted against the sky line. The German officers walked gloomily in advance of their men, not speaking to each other, not looking much at the scenes around them, nor at the Australian soldiers moving their guns forward, but staring at the road ahead of them in gloomy thoughtfulness. A little later I saw down one of the tracks coming away from Clery and our lines about the Somme, under heavy shell-fire by the enemy at that time, a long, dark winding column. "More prisoners," said a friend of mine, and we were both startled by the large number of men. There was something like a battalion of these field-grey men, with about a dozen of their own officers leading them, and they came down the track in good marching order, as though on their own side of the lines. A fairly sturdy lot they looked to me, far better than those I saw yesterday outside Bapaume, and they had put up a strong fight against the Australians, and were not taken easily as far as that went, though with amazingly light losses among their captors. Again their officers looked downcast and sullen. One, a colonel, I think, in the third rank of the officers, was a tall distinguished man, and stared at us as we passed with a kind of cold hatred in his eyes, carrying himself proudly in his humiliation. Other groups of prisoners came down through their own harassing fire, which was heavy on their right in a huddle of ruins called Flaucourt, and in the fields through which they had come where German guns were firing pot shots to catch our batteries and men. In one of our motor-wagons sat a dozen or more wounded prisoners, with dazed eyes and look

of utter exhaustion, and many of their walking comrades had bandaged heads and hands touched by our machine-gun bullets.

All day yesterday the Australians tried to cross the Somme north and south of Péronne. They were close up to the river by Cléry, on the north and in the loop south of Péronne by Biaches, but all the bridges had been blown up by the enemy, and he checked all attemps at throwing others across by intense shell-fire and by ceaseless machine-gun barrage from the opposite banks, where he was strongly entrenched. At Omiecourt there were Germans on the west bank of the river, the only place they held on that side of the Somme loops. With an ingenious courage that was not wasted of human life—the Australians do not believe in throwing their men away by foolhardy recklessness, though when there is need of sacrifice they have never held back—our troops tried to get hand-bridges across the canal, and, by amazing good luck joined to their own cunning, succeeded here and there without many casualties from the fire which slashed their side of the banks. Patrols went across these bridges, but found themselves faced by broad swamps, in which tall rushes grow and many ugly things are floating, but they could not find a single track along which men could pass towards Péronne. A new plan of action was decided upon by the Australian officers, and at half-past ten o'clock yesterday morning one of their units was ordered to work round Cléry, on the north bank of the Somme, and cross the river near Feuillères. Three bodies of Australian troops moved forward at about three o'clock yesterday afternoon, and came in touch with the enemy north-west of Cléry, where they effected a junction with another stronger body of Australians moving forward still farther north. The Germans here fought very hard, and their machine-gunners served their weapons without surrender, but at half-past eleven last night the Australians were masters of the ground to the east of Cléry and had secured fifty prisoners, with fourteen machine guns.

That was only the beginning of the main attack on Mont St.-Quentin. At five o'clock this morning the same body of troops moved forward again, and two hours previously some of their Australian comrades crossed the Somme at Omiecourt, south of them where engineers had been working at a bridge all night. The assault on Mont St.-Quentin from the north bank of the Somme was begun without any definite barrage-line of artillery, but our guns concentrated on certain areas, which they kept under violent fire, shifting to other places when the infantry went forward. The left objective of the Australian assault troops was the village of Feuillaucourt. The centre had Mont St.-Quentin as its goal, and the right set out to take Anvil Wood, below the hill. By half-past seven the whole line of objectives had been gained, and the enemy was badly beaten.

The most extraordinary and splendid thing about this success, which will undoubtedly give us Péronne, is the cheap price paid for it by those great soldiers, the Australians. I know the actual figures of their losses in this assault on most difficult country, which presents the strongest natural features of defence, and they are incredibly small, many times less than the total number of prisoners, and it is the more striking because in the first part of the battle this morning the Germans fought with really determined courage and only surrendered freely when the Australians were well through their defences. Three hundred Australians on the left captured 600 prisoners, and another body of 300 or so took 250 in the centre. I do not know how many prisoners were taken by the troops on the right, but all told, as I have said, there are something like a thousand new birds in the cage from this morning's attack, which is still in progress. This is really something new in war, because the swamps about Péronne were ideal for defence, and frightful to attack, and on the other side of them the German machine-guns rained bullets upon the banks. The enemy was strong, too, in artillery, as I saw


CAMBRAI
AND
THE SOMME
English Miles
0 1 2 3 4
Approximate Battle Fronts
June 1916
Dec 1917
April 1918
land above 500 feet
" 50 to 500 "
25 250
175
CAMBRAI
MARCOING
BAPAUME
BERTINCOURT
COMBLES
ALBERT
PÉRONNE
ROISEL
VERMAND
ST QUENTIN
NESLE

for myself this morning when I went up to the ground south of Mont St.-Quentin, past Dompiérre and Fay, where in March of last year the graves gave up their dead, and past the black, lifeless trees of Herbecourt, through which the Australians had stormed their way, with Biaches and Flaucourt, old places of adventure and horror to the right of me as I stood watching the panorama of the battle.

It was a scene of dark and rather awful aspect this morning, and nature helped to intensify its sombre tones. It had been raining heavily in short storms through the night and early morning, and now the sky was filled with enormous black clouds, pierced through with shafts of vivid light, against which the trunks of dead trees, the ribbed skeletons of ruined houses, and here and there a derelict Tank, an abandoned gun, a dead horse lying with its legs stuck up from the mangled earth, were etched sharply. Our heavy guns, which were behind me, were firing steadily, and their shells were bursting in the black woods beyond St.-Quentin Hill, flinging up clouds of green and white smoke, and the German artillery was replying fiercely, so that Mont St.-Quentin and the valley below was seething with smoke and fire. The loud rush of our shells, the thunder-strokes of our heavy guns, were answered by the crash of German high explosives, following that high whistling which sets all one's senses on the alert as it travels nearer with an ascending note before the final smash. The ruined village of Flaucourt was not a health resort this morning, and had relapsed into evil, as when, a year and a half ago, I went there first, and, by a fluke of luck, escaped some 5.9's, which disturbed its deadly quietude.

This morning the enemy did not like these ruins, and turned on a special battery to smash them to smaller bits. He was harassing the ground about, and an Australian officer whom I met in a dug-out there told me that a big "dud" had landed on his roof, failing to burst by a special providence which interferes with high explosives now and then, and that his corporal had just had a "Blighty" from

a shell-splinter. But this officer and his men were not worrying much, and stood out in the open, some in steel helmets and some with the wind blowing their hair, watching the bombardment and the progress of the battle. "It's good to be on the old ground," I said, still stirred by a journey miles out of Amiens, which a little while ago was closely girdled by hostile guns. The Australian officer laughed, and said, "It's a pity we couldn't start where we left off last year. Our lads don't like covering the same ground twice. They want to get nearer to Berlin." "They have been going ahead at a fine pace," I said, and he grinned, and answered, "It suits them better than trench warfare. It's sitting still that gets on their nerves." Well, the British Army is not sitting still these days, and along a wide front and all behind the lines the forward movement goes on, and nobody who has not seen a vast army on the move, with all its works and supplies, can imagine the world of activity which is now along the battle-front, and the lines of communication creeping forward mile after mile over that abomination of desolation which leads up to the moving front line.

SEPTEMBER 3

ONE fine feature of the Australian capture of Mont St.-Quentin which led the way to the taking of Péronne, now ours, after fierce fighting in the streets with the 2nd German Guards, was the rapid manner in which they moved their guns forward over the Somme, and fired at close range on the enemy. This was largely due to the work of their engineers at the river crossings. At one of these they discovered several land mines laid by the Germans with trap wires artfully concealed, but they routed them out and prevented explosion. Part of the secret of the light Australian losses in this attack was the quick way in which they dived into the German trenches before Cléry, getting shelter there after they had taken 150 prisoners, so that the hail of machine-gun bullets passed harmlessly over their

heads. In the fighting from August 26 until yesterday morning they took fully ten times more prisoners than their own total casualties, which must be a record in this war.

The individual gallantry of the men has reached the high summit of audacity, as when an Australian corporal in a recent action one day, after receiving the V.C., heard his comrades debating how they could destroy an enemy post which was giving them great trouble, and said to them, "That's all right; I'll take it." He slipped one Mills bomb in his pocket, crawled through the tall corn, jumped into the German trench, felled the first man he saw, and by sheer force of spirit so cowed the garrison of the German post that one officer and thirteen men surrendered to him. Trying to keep pace with our advances day by day, one misses individual exploits, and can record only movements in mass and general adventures of great bodies of men, but to me the average courage is most marvellous, as one sees the men carrying on in those battlefields where, for miles behind the lines, as well as in the fighting-line, there is never a respite from the harassing fire.

It is in the centre of our battle-front by Bullecourt, Riencourt, and Ecoust and Vraucourt, now recaptured by us to-day, that the enemy has been putting up his fiercest resistance, and that our men have had hard and bitter fighting. I have narrated how our London lads captured Croisilles a few days ago, and went on to Bullecourt, which they took also by grim assault. West Lancashire troops of the 57th Division on their left had attacked and taken Hendecourt, and some of their patrols had entered Riencourt, while on the right of this line of attack some of the 3rd Division and other men had entered Ecoust, Longatte, and Vraucourt. That was the situation on Thursday and Friday; but under a fierce counter-attack this part of our line was hard-pressed, and not all the ground we had made could be kept. It threatened the enemy's main line of defence in the Drocourt-Quéant line, which he must hold at all costs to safeguard the whole of his Hindenburg line,

of which this is the switch, and he sent up a fresh division, the 58th, to strengthen the mixed units of the 36th and 12th Reserve Divisions, which had been badly shattered and demoralized.

For the first time also our men came up against dismounted German cavalry, including the 15th Dragoons, and men of the 7th Cavalry Division, whose presence shows the enemy's desperate needs of reserves. They fought hard and resolutely, and by repeated assaults gained back part of Bullecourt, Ecoust, and other ground. Round Bullecourt there are two strong earthworks into which the enemy had crowded machine-gun teams, one called Factory Redoubt and the other Station Redoubt, by the railway embankment, and it was these places which gave the Middlesex and Kensington battalions their hardest hours. From Factory Redoubt the enemy swept the troops on our right with machine-gun fire, and the Londoners, who failed for a time to clear it out, in spite of repeated efforts, were ordered to draw back some hundred yards from Bullecourt to avoid the severe fire which was being poured upon them, and to prepare for a new assault.

On Friday night the enemy, who had brought up many new batteries in this direction, suspected this intention, and put down a very heavy barrage of fire in depth in order to prevent new assaults. But yesterday morning London troops, with Liverpool men on their right, and other Lancashire men on their left, gave battle again. They had the support of a number of Tanks, which advanced with them, and made direct attacks upon the German redoubts, while our light whippets hunted around to destroy machine-gun and sniping posts. Middlesex men took Factory Redoubt, with some prisoners, and London Scottish were successful in storming Station Redoubt on the south, without heavy loss. Here the whippets were of great service, working close up and keeping the redoubt under the fire of their light guns. Four hundred prisoners of German dragoons were captured in that hornet's nest.

Meanwhile, on the right, the 13th Liverpools advanced again upon Longatte and Ecoust, and stormed some trenches which had previously been taken by the Suffolks of the 3rd Division in the earlier fighting, and took prisoners well east of Ecoust. But all this ground was still hotly contested, and the enemy renewed his counter-attacks in great strength yesterday, so that there was fighting in and out of villages, and from one hour to another there was no certainty as to their possession on either side.

Last night, as on Friday night, the methods of old trench warfare, with its close, nagging fighting by bombing down trenches and struggling for yards of ground, was resumed; but it seems that this morning the Londoners again took full possession of Bullecourt, and Lancashire battalions of the 57th Division gained Hendecourt and Riencourt. It is the worst form of fighting, and our men much prefer free sweeping movements and wide advances, but here they were right up against the enemy's main defensive positions, for which he will fight with all his powers of resistance, knowing that if he is beaten there his Hindenburg line will be in dire jeojardy. So the boys of London —old London, which on this Sunday evening will be in its best clothes, with church bells ringing, and all its pretty girls in the parks, where no shell-fire slashes through the trees —were in the thick of it under an abominable bombardment in ditches which they have taken by bloody fighting, and with machine-gun bullets flying like swarms of wasps on all sides of them. They have fought gloriously through miles of enemy ground since August 23, when they went through the line of Boyelles and Bory Becquerelles, and broke the Hindenburg line, as once before, in April of last year. Every day since they have fought a battle, and all the pluck and pride that lives in London streets has been revealed on those fields of ruin, in which each tract between that litter and wreckage of war is a highway of heroes, from Balham and Tulse Hill and the Old Kent Road, and other places which were not supposed to be the breeding-

grounds of heroic manhood. Bullecourt belongs to London.

Further north the Canadians have been having hard fighting after their first triumphant march, with hundreds of prisoners in their wake. South of the Scarpe, by Gemappe and Vis-en-Artois, the German resistance has stiffened, for the same reason as it did at Bullecourt, because our progress here imperils their whole line of defence. So they have flung in what reserves they can gather, and some of the best troops that remain to them, and they are counter-attacking and firing every battery they can bring to bear on this ground, with ferocious intent. French-Canadians lately have taken part in some very fierce assaults, and have been through perilous adventures, but with that grim courage which is always theirs when they have to go through hell fire, as at Courcelette, on the Somme, in the old first battles, and many times round Lens.

To the Highlanders of the 51st Division north of them at Pelves and outside Plouvain they pay high tribute, grateful for that strong flank on their left held by kilted men through days of ceaseless fire. We have not been making further headway there, and our men have only been asked to hold the ground they won, though that is not a light and joyous thing to do.

Meanwhile, on our northern front, our battle-line is moving again, and our men are following up the enemy rear-guards, who are covering another programme of retirement, forced upon the enemy by his enormous losses, which compel him, against his pride and will, to shorten his line, even at the loss of positions of immense importance to him. His withdrawal from Bailleul has been followed by a retirement from Kemmel Hill, and positions on the west side of the Ypres-Comines Canal, so that our patrols are reported to be at Vierstraat and Vormezeele and Lindenhoek. His rear-guards are fighting stubbornly to hold us back until he has gained the time he needs for his defensive plans, but apparently our troops have hustled him off the Ravelsberg

Ridge, on the east of Bailleul, and are driving him through Neuve Eglise.

So after the strange vicissitudes of this year's warfare we are getting back again into that old ground of Flanders, the loss of which for a time was a hard thing to bear, because of all the sacrifice of our men through years of fighting and the desperate conquest of the Flanders ridges. As I have been on the southern end of the line from Bapaume downwards to Devil's Wood and the outskirts of Péronne, I have not yet been up into Flanders to see this new phase, but from afar a thrill comes to us to know that Bailleul, that good old friendly town of Bailleul, which I have known for years as the capital of our northern armies, and saw in April last on fire from hostile shelling, is no longer in enemy hands, and that once again our men are walking over Kemmel Hill, from which we used to watch the enemy's lines and see the sweep of battle in the salient.

Kemmel Hill will not be a pleasant place for a walk for some time to come. The enemy has doubtless arranged many devilish devices there, such as trip wires, which touch off high explosives. He has been busy with those filthy tricks along many parts of the Front, and has arranged a variety of traps which would blow men to death if they touch innocent-looking objects. One of these things had the appearance of a book lying on a shelf, but when moved it set off a bomb to carry a man's hand away. But our engineers are quick to see the trick of the wire, and by this time perhaps they have searched Kemmel for its secrets.

Before going the enemy blew up his ammunition dump and the material too heavy to move. I know some Frenchmen who will be glad that Kemmel is in our hands again, for when we were hardest pressed in April last it was French troops who defended this hill and lost it after tragic fighting. I met those French troops who held the outer defences holding their line at Locre with the most self-sacrificing courage under dreadful fire, which, they told

me, was far worse than anything they had seen at Fleury, by Verdun. Perhaps some of my readers will remember what I wrote about that old French colonel who was there, that gallant old man who was so proud of his children, as he called them. It will be a sweet vengeance to him to know that the Germans have to creep away from Kemmel again.

The enemy's object is easy to guess, and, indeed, he has revealed it beyond much doubt. To save his man-power, thinned out by the frightful losses in this year of a devil's gamble with Fate, he is, I believe, retiring to a line north and south of Armentières, hoping, perhaps, to hold the line of ridges from Wytschaete and Messines, as in the old days when we were in the low country of the Ypres salient.

Looking at the general situation as it exists after yesterday's and to-day's successes at Péronne, it seems to me that we have practically reached the result of the British offensive which began on August 8, and has had the result of flinging back the enemy from the ground which he traversed after March 21, when he hurled the full weight of his available forces upon the British front, with odds of three to one in the hope of destroying us for ever. In less than four weeks we have almost completely reversed the the table of fortune, so that he has been smashed back twenty miles and more, and all the country between Amiens and Bapaume, and Amiens and Péronne, is cleared of his men, except of those who lie dead in ditches and craters; while north of the Scarpe we have gone further than ever before in this war; and, further north still, the Germans are forced to withdraw from positions which they gained by enormous sacrifice, without our being troubled to fight them.

That is the wonderful chapter of history, and the triumph of it, the marvel of it, is that these victories have been gained very largely by those very troops who sustained the full brunt of the German offensive in March, again in April when the enemy made his attack in Flanders, and once again were engaged—some of them, like the High-

land Division—in the French assaults near Rheims. No troops in the world or in history have been more tried by fire, and never, as far as my knowledge of history goes, have any masses of men struck such a succession of rapid and victorious blows after battling so long in rear-guard and holding actions with heavy losses, enormous fatigue, and the mental strain of intense activity and never-ending danger.

Our Australian and Canadian troops were fresher than our English battalions because they had escaped the previous battles more than those, and since they have done wonders. We could not have achieved these results without them, but the greatest glory of human endurance goes to the English, Scottish, and Irish battalions who fought in the retreat of March, who fought again in Flanders, who suffered losses which would have broken the spirit of weaker men, and who now, in these recent weeks, have beaten the enemy fairly and squarely back over the same ground. During the past day or two the enemy has recovered somewhat, it seems, from the demoralization which overtook his men, and has brought up divisions which are fighting hard to save the reputation of the German army, but that army as a whole, will never recover its prestige or its power, however long they maintain their defensive warfare—and it will be long yet.

This autumn some 400,000 boys of the 1920 class may fill up the gaps in their ranks, and they will be well-trained young soldiers, capable, no doubt, of hard fighting; but Germany has lost in weeks so many in prisoners and wounded that these new drafts will not give her back the initiative. Everything that follows must be a further decline in her strength and fighting quality, and the knowledge of her doom is upon her. There have been various factors in our success, never to be separated from the courage of our men, to whom victory is due, and undoubtedly the Tanks have helped most to secure surprise and terror. We have many proofs that the German command

recognizes them as a terrible menace, and one is a captured German order which says that the enemy only attacks with Tanks. "If we shoot the Tanks to pieces, we shall have won the battle." And then bribes men to destroy the Tanks by offers of decorations.

Many other captured documents reveal the decline in the discipline of the German troops, owing to their frightful losses and weariness of the war, as well as real demoralization in the fighting-line. In Germany there is reason for that sense of despair and fear which seems to prevail there. Now that Péronne and Bullecourt have fallen the enemy has the Hindenburg line as his next refuge, and there he will hope to stand, if attacked further, but even that is broken in the north, and his Drocourt-Quéant switch-line is severely threatened. We may rest content with this result of our renewed offensive. Whatever may follow will begin a new chapter of the war, which promises further victory, helping us to the last victory which will end all this frightful strife.

V

Through the Drocourt-Quéant Line

September 4

More than 10,000 prisoners behind our lines are the best human proof of yesterday's victory when our troops broke the Drocourt-Quéant line, and to-day the enemy is in hard retreat from a wide belt of country north and south of the Arras-Cambrai road, in a desperate hurry to escape lest his transport and troops may be encircled by our men, who are pressing their pursuit. The capture of Quéant last night by our naval brigades, with Pronville beyond it, gives us the enemy's most important pivot, where the Drocourt line joined the main Hindenburg line, which has been completely turned, so that this fortress position on which the Germans set their hopes of safety in defence is now in

jeopardy. Lowland Scots of the 52nd Division are walking along the Hindenburg line south-east of Quéant, clearing it of any men who may still be in hiding there, while the naval men of the Drakes and Hoods and Ansons and Marines are following the line of the Hindenburg support trenches, and curving downwards to the valley of the Hirondelle river, and across its slopes, to get astride of the Bapaume-Cambrai road, which is the enemy's line of retreat for all his heavy transport scurrying away, and burning their stores and camps behind them.

There are great possibilities of success in this situation to-day, when beyond any doubt the enemy is more panic-stricken, as he has all need to be, than at any time in this war, having lost his strongest defensive positions, many battalions of men, of whom he is in desperate want, and is at his wits' end to gather fresh reserves in time to make a stand before much more is lost. Our troops, among whom I have been to-day, are not in a mood to make things easy for him, and are exerting their utmost strength of body and spirit, not heeding need of sleep or rest, to keep those Germans on the move and rattled out of their halting-places.

In my message yesterday I said how the German Command had scraped up every unit of every division which still gave some hope of fighting quality, in order to counter-attack us with ferocity and gain back their Hindenburg line. Ten divisions were identified against us in the region of Cagnicourt and Dury, and we took prisoners of every company of every regiment yesterday, as I saw them streaming back without escort over the battlefields, beaten and glad of capture, and to-day again I have seen many more trudging down our tracks after last night's progress. But until last evening it seemed likely that those Germans would show some kind of strength, and come back at us with a grim endeavour to retrieve their losses. That did not happen. What did happen was a steady forward movement of our men all through the darkness of last night, all through its rainstorms, until the light of dawn came and

they moved faster still to make more gains, and everywhere the enemy yielded before them, and in some places, like Quéant, the key position of all his line, he crept away in advance of our men without a show of fighting.

The Canadians and English held the line last evening east of Eterpigny Wood, south-eastwards to Dury and Villers-le-Cagnicourt, and thence southwards to our side of Inchy. They, too, were expecting counter-attacks, and at one time the airmen reported Germans massing in a wood called Aubigny-au-Bois, covered by an aerial escort of nineteen air scouts. Some of our flying men tried to break through that formation of aeroplanes, but only one of our pilots could get past them under cover of the clouds, and then he bombed the assembling troops so fiercely that they were broken up, and never came forward. The night was quiet on the Canadian front, and in the morning their troops advanced again, to the west of Saudemont, and then onwards two miles further, beyond Inchy, and towards that old evil forest of Bourlon Wood, where last November our men of the 62nd Division and others fought in clouds of poison gas and under storms of shells. English troops of the 4th Division working with the Canadians on their left took the village of Etaing last night, with sixty prisoners, and this morning their patrols went into Rècourt Wood, east of that, encountering the enemy rear-guards, but not meeting stubborn resistance anywhere, so that they went beyond to the high plateau 1000 yards further. The enemy shelled the village of Récourt as soon as our men were in it, so quickly that it is clear his gunners expected us to arrive, and their fighting-line withdrew some distance back, leaving a wide No Man's Land for our men to cross.

It was reported this morning that German troops were debouching in Marquion across the Arras-Cambrai road, not far from their rear-guards, and our guns found this place for their target.

Meanwhile our West Lancashires, Naval Brigades, and Lowland Scots of the 57th, 63rd, and 52nd Divisions were

advancing steadily below the Canadians. I told yesterday how the West Lancashires attacked in the morning in line with the Canadians after much hard fighting on previous days, and then swung southwards and cleared out the triangle between the Hindenburg support line and Calling Wood, where many pockets of the enemy remained with machine-gun nests, giving much trouble by their cross-fire. They did this with dogged courage, and in one place south of Bois de Bouche Marines of our Naval Brigades helped them to crush one of these wasps' nests. The naval men now came into action, determined to get their own back and go far forward after their adventures last March, when they had to fall back before the enemy across the Somme battlefields, where I met them then fighting bitter rear-guard actions. They had to march far yesterday over ground which I travelled to-day, so that I know the look of it and the smell of it and the horror of it. All behind our present front, which is moving forward so quickly, there is for many miles a wide stricken wilderness. There are no landmarks here as even now on the Somme battlefields, where at least there are rivers and roads and natural features upon which imagination may fasten for remembrance. But here beyond Neuville-Vitasse and Boiry and Croisilles there is nothing but a landscape of far monotony rising and falling slightly from one slope to another, without high roads cutting across it, without a river valley to break its lines, without even ruins more than rubbish-heaps of brick which once were hamlets. Trenches marked by hummocks of white chalk zigzag over this infernal desolation, where tangles of barbed wire, all rusted to the colour of withered bracken, piles of abandoned shells gleaming wet in the rain, thousands of German stick-bombs, gas-masks, helmets, boots, rifles, shattered gun-limbers, lorries slashed to pieces by explosives, huts broken to matchwood, are flung about between tumbled-down dug-outs, deserted gun-pits, overturned blockhouses, dead horses, and deep shell-pits.

Through this plague-stricken land mile after mile to the far horizon our men are marching and our guns are going up, and our tents are pitched, and our wounded come walking down. To them it has become a familiar sight. They do not turn their heads to study how all this obscenity of the wilderness of death is changed to different tones of evil or of grimness when the sunlight breaks through the rainclouds and washes it all with a pale gold light, revealing more sharply the detail of it all, or how it is darkened when the sun is hidden by a black wrack of clouds piled up above the distant slopes. Yet there was one feature of the landscape to which the Naval men turned their heads when they marched up to battle. It is the only thing left standing in all this ruin behind our lines with some character and meaning beyond mere ruin. In the centre of Croisilles, which has been quite destroyed, so that hardly one brick stands whole upon another, there is a Calvary of life-size figures. The figure of Christ has been smashed from the Cross and lies face upwards on a little hillock, but the Madonna is still left, almost unscarred, I think, and foremost the figure of St. John stands out above all this wreckage with a queer gesture of pity for the evil that has been done. I write these things so that people who do not see them may have in their minds' eye the scenes through which our men are passing; yet no words of mine can give more than a faint blurred image of what this desolation is really like. For miles our Naval Brigades marched through this until they reached their line of action, south of the Canadians and below Bouche Wood.

As I have said, some Royal Marines turned aside to go to the help of the West Lancashires, but two other bodies of Marines and Ansons, followed by Hawkes, Drakes, and Hoods, went forward to their first objectives, swinging south-eastwards in order to come down to the valley of the Hirondelle, or the Agache Valley, as it is sometimes called, in order to block it below Inchy. Here and there they were checked by machine-gun fire from German

strongholds, but they were successful in destroying these posts, and passed on. They passed beyond the range and help of their guns for a time into the zone of open warfare, having to rely utterly upon their own rifles and machine-guns for fire-power. Their machine-guns did terrible work among the enemy. One team fired 30,000 rounds at the retreating Germans, and many men fell under this sweeping fire.

Very cunningly and rapidly our naval machine-gun crews worked their way forward, with patrols and small bodies of infantry, enfilading the German positions and getting their targets. After all the first objectives had been taken one brigadier went round his forward line, examined the problem ahead, and, satisfied that his men could go further without grave peril, ordered them to advance again, and keep going as long as they did not lose touch with each other, or meet trouble in overwhelming odds. Darkness came, but they did not stop, and still crept on slowly and cautiously into the enemy's country, until dawn came, when they found themselves on the west side of Inchy, with Quéant and Pronville below them, and the valley curving down south-eastward. Their duty was to block the valley and to capture Quéant by this turning movement from the north.

According to this plan, they spread out and went down the slopes to the valley on the east side of Quéant and Pronville, closer to them than had been intended at first, but achieving the same result. All the Germans had fled from Quéant before their arrival, panic-stricken at the knowledge that we were behind their lines and bearing down on them. A small garrison of seventy men were still holding out in Pronville, and these surrendered to a man when they found themselves surrounded.

Later this morning the Naval Brigades advanced again below Inchy, towards the Bapaume-Cambrai road, the object, as I have said, being to cut this artery of the German retreat. If they are successful, it is almost certain

that they will hamper the movement of the German forces in the sharp retreat further south, and they will prevent the withdrawal of the heavy transport. So far the enemy has succeeded in getting away most of his guns, but has been forced to blow up some of his howitzers, which are now behind our lines, with their crews as prisoners.

The work of our own gunners in getting forward to keep pace as far as possible with the infantry advance has been very fine, and I saw to-day how our batteries were straining every nerve to follow up over all this wild, roadless land. Some of our 60-pounders, which are heavy and slow-going weapons, were already so far forward that at noon to-day they opened rapid fire on to the cross-roads outside Cambrai, so that this highway must have been a terror to the crowded German transport struggling back in their retreat.

German prisoners coming back through this ground watched our gun teams gloomily, understanding the meaning and marvel of all this movement towards their lines, where cheery young gunner officers called to their men to carry on and make haste after the Hun, and gunner colonels rode forward to prospect new positions, and the transport men tethered their horses in fields from which the enemy had gone only a little while ago, leaving a frightful litter and filth behind him. Small groups of prisoners passed and passed, so that we must have gone well beyond that 10,000, and in the wired enclosures stood new arrivals, who had drifted down after the night, and were now under guard, miserable-looking men, sleeping themselves into forgetfulness of war, or pacing up and down like animals in a cage, or munching the food which we had provided. They were very hungry, many of them having gone several days without supplies, owing to the chaos and disorganization behind the German line. But one figure among these groups attracted my attention more than others, because of his gay plumage. It was a young German cavalry officer, like a caricature by Hansi, in sky-blue coat with

red collar, almost too beautiful to be true in time of war. He was a haughty young man, too proud to speak, even with German infantry officers, so that he kept aloof from them, and paced up and down, up and down, as he had been doing, I am told, for many hours.

There were numbers of dismounted cavalrymen among our prisoners, wearing a yellow band round their caps, and belonging to the 7th Cavalry Division, which has been almost completely destroyed during the last twenty-four hours. These men curse the fate which brought them to the Western Front after an easy time in Russia, where they knew nothing of British barrages and believed the war was won. In one camp not far from Arras there were to-day several thousands of prisoners belonging to ten different divisions, and looking at them one might well wonder whether at last one might be justified in believing that the German army is beginning to crack. Only just beginning, and not near breaking-point yet. Up in the north they are still drawing back in Flanders, and on the other side of Péronne the Australians are gaining much of our old ground. Whole German armies on both fronts are being forced into retreat, and how they will camouflage all this under the eyes of their own people or explain what cannot be explained away is an interesting problem.

Our men are full of hope and eagerness to make an end of the whole business, to strike so hard and go so fast that the enemy will have no time to recover. To end the year with peace is what inspires the hearts of our men, and for that they will fight with their spirits keyed high. Perhaps our wishes go beyond realities, but at least the vision is good.

Some of our men are on their way back to something like peace already. Red Cross trains are coming down from the casualty clearing-stations with the "Blighty" men. They lie close to the windows, and, having passed down from that abominable land where nothing grows between shell-craters but rank grass and weeds, and where there is

nothing human except their human selves in this devilish desert of war, they travel now behind the lines into the sweet, good country of France, where the last of the harvest is being gathered in, and bronzed wheatsheaves stand in stubbled fields, and peasant girls wave hands to them, and small boys and girls watch by clover patches where sleek cattle feed and white sun-drenched clouds are piled high above peaceful villages. Through this landscape near to the scene of war our wounded pass homeward bound after their great victories.

SEPTEMBER 14

FIGHTING continued throughout yesterday and into the night for our possession of Havrincourt village, Trescault, Mœuvres, and the neighbouring ground, taken by the gallant and skilful fighting of Lancashire troops and Yorkshire troops of the 62nd Division, and some troops of the Rifle Brigade and 60th Rifles in the 37th Division, and New Zealanders. It developed into a much bigger success than I knew yesterday, as I discovered to-day when I went up into that area, and found that the number of prisoners had reached the total of eleven officers and 1018 men—those I have seen are a sturdy lot—and that the day's action had resulted in a fine and complete success, taking us across another section of the Hindenburg line at Havrincourt, and south of that, back into our old lines, which we held before our attack in the Cambrai salient last year.

The hardest task lay in front of the riflemen, who had Trescault and its neighbourhood as their goal. They, with battalions of Royal Fusiliers, Essex, Hertfordshires, Somersets and Lincolns, have been working on the left of the New Zealanders since the beginning of our offensive in August. They had already been nine weeks in the line before that. Starting somewhere by Bucquoy, smashing their way across the deep cutting outside Achiet-le-Grand, where they captured 400 machine-guns, fighting a hard battle at Bihucourt, pushing on to Biefvillers, and then fol-

lowing up the enemy, of whom they had taken over 2000 men, to the edge of Havrincourt Wood.

It is evident that the enemy intended to defend this wood seriously. On the edge of it he had dug new rifle pits in double rows, and held these with strong bodies of marksmen with machine-guns. But our English battalions, in a quick dash at the end of their day's advance, swept through the north-west corner of the wood, only a part not defended in such strength, while New Zealanders rushed forward below the wood. That outflanks the Germans in their rifle-pits, and they retreated during the night. A little while before our English had been fighting hard for possession of the spoil-heap on one side of the Canal-du-Nord, which is 90 feet deep hereabouts, and had driven the enemy off its mound—in the old days of our adventure in the Cambrai salient I watched a battle from there—and across the canal, so making way for further progress towards Havrincourt village.

Round about Mœuvres two bodies of English troops, including several Lancashire battalions, were having hard fighting against desperate resistance, but they succeeded in capturing the village yesterday, and later in the day broke up a strong and determined counter-attack, inflicting severe losses on the enemy.

Yesterday morning the 62nd Division, of Yorkshire troops, on the left of the Rifles, who had New Zealanders on the right, assembled for an attack from Havrincourt to Gouzeaucourt. The Rifle Brigade and the King's Royal Rifles changed their front, and drew up before the battle on the south-east edge of Havrincourt Wood, spending anxious hours there lest the enemy should soak them with gas. But when dawn came on a day of foul weather they still breathed freely, and when our guns opened fire they went ahead. There was no preliminary bombardment beyond the usual slogging of the guns, brought up as I saw them to-day by miracles of labour, through miles of old battle-fields now deep in mud.

At the beginning of the battle these opened rapid fire and provided a creeping barrage, behind which our men marched to meet their enemy. It was no surprise to the Germans. On the south of our new front of attack, by Gouzeaucourt, they had brought up their Jaeger division, and opposite the Yorkshiremen and the Rifles they had their 113th and 52nd Divisions, both of which have suffered heavily in recent history, and have not received any drafts to make up their wastage—a most remarkable state of affairs, observed elsewhere during these battles of the month, which have an important significance, revealing an almost unexpected weakness in German resources of man-power.

The troops here had been ordered to hold on to the Havrincourt, Trescault, and Gouzeaucourt line of defence at any price in blood, and on the whole they did their best to fulfil this command yesterday. They fought hard, especially hard in the line which defended the crest of the ridge, though the men in the foremost lines below the crest were broken easily. They were very strong on the ridge behind Trescault village, and in a strong point called Bilhem Farm, at the end of the spur, and it was there that the riflemen had the greatest trouble with machine-gunners and the German infantry. There was a trench—one of our old trenches—newly organized bending backwards, from Trescault on the outer boundary of our objective for about 400 yards, which was reconnoitred by the battalion commander at the end of the day's fighting, and he found it held by a strong force of the enemy. His men then attacked it, and after a sharp encounter with men who resisted fiercely, captured it with 140 prisoners and eighteen machine-guns. The strong point of Bilhem Farm, from which I once saw our Tanks going into action, was taken very neatly by an encircling movement of two small bodies of riflemen, who worked north and south of it, and joined hands on the other side.

Meanwhile, the Yorkshires of the 62nd Division had stormed the heights of Havrincourt, gaining the château

and its grounds, and a clear view over the enemy positions below and away to Bourlon Wood, and on the south the New Zealanders were pushing forward to Gouzeaucourt Wood, which they took in the evening. Gradually through the day the numbers of prisoners increased, as their dug-outs and hiding-places were searched, until at night, from all parts of this front, over a thousand had dribbled back. For a time it seemed likely that the enemy was preparing to deliver a formidable counter-attack. His troops were seen massing in the valleys and sunken roads, and low-flying aeroplanes came out in reconnaissance to support the infantry by bombing and machine-gunning.

The attack was delivered at seven last night against the Yorkshires of the 62nd, and the Rifles of the 37th, Divisions, but our gun-fire smashed it, and small parties of men were dealt with by rifle-fire. It is possible they will try again, but so far, while I was on that front to-day, there was no German activity beyond pot-shots from long-range guns. I passed a little group of prisoners newly caught this morning, mostly of the 113th Division, and many of those taken yesterday were resting on their way back in ruins of their own making in this world of ruin. They were muddy, but not ill-clad. I noticed especially their good field-boots and their thick grey tunics. They stared about them in an animal way, like trapped beasts, but were alert and respectful when spoken to by our officers, and seemed content to sit and stare at the passing of our men and guns.

It is a queer sensation to go through this country again beyond Bapaume, down old roads which were familiar to us last year, through these fields and villages, where, amidst old ruin and wreckage, we built thousands of Nissen huts and many officers' clubs and cinema sheds, and pitched camps of tents and established workshops, and camouflaged many gun positions. For a time, which now seems like a nightmare, all that sweep of country was overrun again by the enemy, and was twenty miles or more behind his

lines, and now once again the evil spell has lifted from it; the grey wolves have gone, and only their lairs remain, and the things that belonged to their brief tenancy.

Things tragic and things abominable. Everywhere now among our old graves, the graves of our dead boys, there are new graves of German soldiers. They stick up out of the mud and the swamps in these ravaged fields, with wooden crosses, different in shape from ours, and surmounted with the steel helmets camouflaged by streaks of colour belonging to men below who walked in them down these roads. Dead bodies not yet buried and dead horses lie amidst the muck-heaps of these battlegrounds, and everywhere there are old boots, old bottles, strips of field-grey uniforms, haversacks, stick bombs, German letters, the litter of masses of men who went away in a hurry. They are great signwriters, these Germans, and everywhere for miles and miles, at every turn in the road, at every broken wall leading to a village smashed to dust and ashes, there are notices on big boards warning German soldiers not to loiter there because of English aircraft, pointing the way to dug-outs and fire trenches, signifying wells, dressing-stations, isolation camps for mangy horses, workshops, and field kitchens, and the inevitable Kommandatur.

They are the notices of a life that has passed a few days ago or a few weeks ago, and from them one is able to picture in one's mind how it all looked here when thousands of field-grey men swarmed in all these places. The spirit of the grey wolf still lurks about these ruins, because wherever men have been they leave a little of themselves like a ghostly exhalation. In a wood not far from Havrincourt to-day there were more than a few relics of the late German occupation. Finely camouflaged under the trees, the 14th Reserve Corps had made their headquarters here when the place was beyond our gun range, and as becomes the grandeur of a German Corps Staff, and the comfort of such high officers, German soldiers had laboured to make a pleasant dwelling-place for them. They had built a large

number of wooden bungalows, beautifully fitted up with cupboards and panels like summer-houses in a garden suburb.

Each small house was provided with a dug-out, approached from an indoor entrance, to which the German Staff officers might descend with dignity at the first distant drone of an English aeroplane. And one officer, perhaps the corps commander, nervous of night bombing, as all men are, had made for himself a peculiar bed, in which he might sleep with less anxiety. It was built into the wall of one of these summer-houses, and surrounded by enormous beams of white wood, finely planed and polished and bevelled, which he could shut around him by means of hinges. There, thickly encoffined, he would be proof at least from bomb splinters and all but direct hits. This rustic camp in the wood was abandoned hurriedly by the German corps, when there were worse things to fear than night bombing raids, and was taken over for a time by the 4th Bavarians until their headquarters staff fled, too, at the sound of the British field-guns coming near and nearer, and at the sight of wounded German soldiers staggering back from defeat in the fields nearby.

Yesterday over all these places there were violent rainstorms, and our troops attacking Havrincourt and Trescault fought wet to the skin, and lay in watercourses and deep puddles. It hardly ceased raining all day with steady violence, and our aeroplanes were prevented from making successful flights. But this morning the sky cleared, with long stretches of blue between white cloud mountains, and the sun shone over the battlefields with a gay light, as one sees in some of Orpen's pictures, gilding the wet trunks of branchless trees, deepening the glowing redness of ruined houses with patches of blue sky through holes in their walls, glistening on the twisted strands of barbed wire, and revealing old, chalky parapets of trench lines with snowy whiteness. These places have a new kind of horror when the sun is shining. It is all like Satan smiling

at sin. There is a kind of mirthful mockery about this foul distortion of country and towns, where once there were pleasant homes and the sanity of life. And into all this scenery of war about Bapaume our men have come back again, with the queer pageant of their business, and only a few days after the departure of the enemy our horse-lines are established there, and our field-hospitals have hoisted the Red Cross flags, and our gun-wagons are parked in the mud flats, where the puddles look like pools of liquid gold.

So our Army moves forward like a deep tide of men and beasts and machines, slopping over into places from which invisible barriers have been removed, and where there was solitude, or the hiding-place of men afraid of death, there is now a seething movement of life in war.

SEPTEMBER 15

SINCE our capture of Havrincourt, Trescault, and Gouzeaucourt by the 62nd Yorkshire Division, the Rifle Brigade, and the 60th Rifles, and the New Zealanders, followed by counter-attacks, which were repulsed, there has been no important infantry action, and the Germans have remained almost passive, except for violent gun-fire along this line. All day yesterday they poured on Havrincourt Château and Wood, and south of Gouzeaucourt Wood, with long-range guns; they harassed our roads and camps with high-velocity shells; our guns replied with at least equal intensity; and it is certain from the evidence of our forward observing officers that many Germans were destroyed in their Hindenburg lines. Yesterday there was some bomb fighting down a trench that is dug up to Bilhem Farm, at the end of the spur which strikes out from Havrincourt, and it seems that the enemy has established a post here which is an important point of observation. By this time he may have lost it again.

Up in our First Army there has also been heavy hostile shelling north and south of the Scarpe, and most intensely over Fosse, which we captured by a *coup-de-main* the day

before yesterday. I first saw that high, black slag-heap during the Battle of Loos in 1915, when the Guards were fighting for it under a very frightful fire, so that, though they took it, they could not hold it, and the last time I saw it was from our trenches up at Hulluch, when, on a day like this, with a blue sky and bright sunlight, it shone like a hill of black diamonds against the white chalk of the trench parapets beyond. It means nothing to the world, but to the soldiers of ours who have lived close to that oblong hill of cinders from which the enemy could stare down into our lines it is a place of grim and horrible remembrance.

Right down south, beyond Péronne and on the outskirts of St.-Quentin, the Australians are working forward a little, but they are letting the enemy retire to the Hindenburg line in that part of the country more or less at his own leisure, knowing that he intends to get into that line of retreat, and not wasting our men in hurrying him up for no good purpose.

It is, as I have said, fine weather again, with just a first touch of autumn in the wind at night, but to-day warm and drowsy, with the sun on the yellowing leaves of the trees in the full glory of their foliage; the bells are ringing in the little French churches of villages behind the lines, and there seems to be a new note of gladness in them, because there is good news of the war where the Americans are fighting with the French, and there is not a peasant of France who is not hopeful that at last, after weary waiting and immense sacrifice and loneliness in fields from which their young manhood has gone, the good victory may come which shall bring peace again and their sons back to the farmsteads, and thrust back for ever from their frontiers the grey wolves who have destroyed so many fair things. It is the wistful hope of all the women and old people, but they guard themselves from disappointment by saying, as one old woman I knew said, "We may want more patience yet."

In our Army the men are glad of a short respite from fighting, for, in spite of all our recent victories and the light losses which we have recorded, truly enough the price of victory is always tragic—some good comrades have fallen in recent days—and the fatigue of battle is enormous and cannot be endured for ever. Sir Douglas Haig's mention, and the brief history of the divisions who have played a chief part in all this fighting, will gladden the men, because they are proud of their divisions, and like the world and their own folk at home to know what they have done. From time to time we have been allowed to mention some of these divisions—the glorious 51st of Highlanders, the 62nd Yorkshires, who have just captured Havrincourt after many other battles, the 63rd Naval Division, who took Quéant and Pronville after triumphant progress from Logeast Wood to Le Barke, but never in so complete a list as now given by the Commander-in-Chief.

Perhaps the numbers of divisions do not mean much to the world yet, but to us who have gone through these years of war in France each one of them has a fame of its own, associated with many of those ruined villages which lie in the wide tract of desolation through which our men have fought backwards and forwards in these years. We have seen them going into battle and coming out with weakened ranks. We have sat down in their battalion masses and looked for remembered faces and have not found them. We have passed them along the roads a thousand times, knowing them by the signs on their transport and by the look of them, and we have met them before defeat and before victory in their trenches and dug-outs, in observation posts looking to the German lines, and have had jokes and laughter with them, and heard strange tales from them, and seen something of their sufferings and their sacrifice in their worst days as well as in their best, and have recorded as well as may be their daily achievements.

So such a number as the 56th Division means to us more

than a number. To me it means London men, men of my city, Kensingtons, and Queen's Westminsters, and London Rifle Brigade, and fellows who have a Cockney way of speech, a Cockney humour, and a city-bred imagination, which is not good for a man to have in war, because he suffers for it and fights on his nerves. They were not worse soldiers for that, perhaps better, because of an intellectual pride, and the 56th London, like the 47th London, the heroes of Loos—while they fought with the 15th Scottish—and last, but not least, the 58th London have proved their fighting quality all the way from Flanders to the Oise on many battle-grounds north and south of Arras.

I met the 58th Londoners down by La Fère before March 21 of evil memory, and they said, "When is this battle going to begin?" It was strangely quiet then, but when it did begin, a few days later, the 58th were cut off below the German main thrust, and for some weeks were utterly isolated from the British Army and fought with the French and lived on French rations. One remembers many little things which fix the numbers of divisions in one's mind, and odd meetings and odd adventures with them. But generally they recall some special battle, or some outstanding achievement, as for all time the 38th Welsh will be linked with the name of Mametz Wood and with the smashing of the German Cockchafers on the Pilkem Ridge, and now with their gallant exploit in wading through the foul waters of the Ancre and storming the heights of La Boiselle before their drive to Longueval and Delville Wood, where I saw them that day.

The 52nd Lowland Division have not been so long with us as others on the Western Front. When they came first they were lean fellows, tanned by the sun of Egypt, and telling old tales of Gallipoli, where they suffered more, they say, than in any fighting since, though they fought hard the other day at Boyelles and Henin and with the naval men along the Hindenburg line. The 5th Division, with

Devons and Kents and Cornwall Light Infantry, have a long history of heroism, which ended for a time on the Western Front when they left the mud swamps of Flanders to go to the sunshine of Italy. Now they are back again, and were here in time to call the enemy to a halt at Merville and fight back through the country around Bapaume by Achiet-le-Petit and Irles and Frémicourt, with New Zealanders in comradeship.

The old 3rd Division holds within its own records the history of this war since the autumn of 1914. They knew the days when our guns were very few, and in the Ypres salient the enemy strafed us by day and night, and we could hardly answer back. They knew what winter meant in water-logged trenches by St.-Eloi and the Bluff, up there beyond Ypres, and in the first battles of the Somme they lay outside Longueval and Bazetin under storms of fire, but drove the enemy down to Guillémont and made him fear them—those Suffolks, and East Yorkshires, and Gordons, and Royal Scots. Wherever there was hard fighting there the old 3rd was, and has been ever since, round Béthune and Arras, and up by Croisilles, and a few weeks ago through the village of Noreuil, which they captured by bitter fighting.

It would take a volume, or rather many volumes, to narrate the history of all the divisions named by the Commander-in-Chief, the old British divisions of English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish battalions—all too few Irish battalions—who throughout this war have been the solid backbone of our Army, who, again and again, have fought themselves almost to a finish, until new drafts came along to learn the spirit of the older men, and who have planted a forest of graves, a forest of little white crosses, where their heroic dead lie over all these battlefields of France. They have not had much publicity. Often it has been necessary to hide the names of their battalions and divisions to prevent the enemy knowing our order of battle,

because they are in smaller units than the Australians and Canadians, who fight in corps and are quickly identified. That has been rough on them, and rough on the correspondents who want to give them their honour; but when the full history of this war is written the names of their battalions will be in every chapter, and their glory, and agonies, and sacrifice, and courage will never be forgotten.

PART VII

THE BATTLE FOR CAMBRAI

I

Beyond Bourlon Wood

September 30

Our troops are gaining such brilliant successes all along the line that one can hardly keep pace with their progress. To-day, while our Second Army, with Allied forces, were striking between Armentières and the coast, regaining Wytschaete and many old places for which our men fought long and hard a year ago, I went to another ridge above Bourlon village, ours only yesterday for the first time in history, looked into the city of Cambrai, and saw outspread our promised land where, if things go well, we may spend this winter beyond the belt of desolation now behind us. The five spires of Cambrai rose into the blue sky, and there was sun on the city roofs—whole roofs, it seemed, hardly touched by fire, so that they were strange and good to see after so many wanderings among places we call villages and towns where there are no roofs and no unbroken walls.

The Canadians were almost at the gates of Cambrai when I went among them to-day, and where, across fields of thistles, lying low, because the enemy still had observation of us, I looked at the battle being fought. It was clear that our men were beyond the village of Raillencourt, just to the left of Cambrai, because the German guns were shell-

ing it fiercely, clouds of rosy smoke rising from its streets as the red-brick cottages were hit by high explosives. Later in the day I met some Tank crews who had just come back from an early morning adventure there. One Tank was commanded by a lance-corporal, and he and a bright boy with him, once in the cavalry, told how they cruised round the north side of the village and then worked down its streets. At the south end they came across belts of barbed wire and trampled them down, and then made straight for a machine-gun nest which was firing at them. They put it out of action with their heavy gun, and the German machine-gunners fled from them.

In all this battle since yesterday morning, when it began with such triumph, our Tanks have done splendid work. Not many of them were used, and some of those were veterans, who saw fighting in Flanders, but are still going strong. When the battle opened yesterday they crossed the Canal-du-Nord on bridges made under heavy fire by our engineers, and worked up to Bourlon Wood, where they trampled down machine-gun emplacements and did good service to the Canadian infantry. One Tank crossed a mined road, and the ground exploded under it, but only one man was wounded. To-day I saw other Tanks going into action, crawling up the road like long slugs as one saw them in the grey light of rainstorms. With gunners following them and gun transport going forward in streams, and down the tracks on every side of them German prisoners in small groups, and German wounded carrying down comrades on stretchers. An officer of the Tank Corps hailed us as we passed, and was in high spirits with the success of the two days' work. "They have been grand days for the Tanks," he said. "There were not many of us, but the old 'buses were gallant, and we have fairly put it across the Boche."

There was a marvellous picture of open warfare to-day on the battlefields, and great painters should have been there to put down for all time the colour and movement

and sweep of it, though no painter could quite bring back to the senses the horror as well as the heroism of these scenes. For one walked past many horrors on the way of our advance, where German dead and ours lay as they fell in the fight for the canal crossings and upwards to Bourlon Wood. There were few of ours, but if one had any pity in one's heart it was moved by the sight of those field-grey men lying scattered there, terribly mangled by our fire, so that they had lost all look of humanity. And some horses lay about killed by the harassing fire of the German long-range guns yesterday or to-day, and the wind that blew over these fields was tainted with death. And yet, because of the victory, which is like wine to men's hearts, there were gaiety and laughter and high spirits among all our fighting men who moved through these scenes. In the forward lines up by Bourlon some of them were digging cubby holes in the ground to give themselves shelter from the wind and rain and shell-splinters, or making themselves at home in deep shell-craters. I talked with a group of gunner officers who were doing their own digging, and as they wielded their shovels they described how well they were going, and wanted all I could tell them in exchange about our latest progress north and south. For miles around there was a seething movement of men and horses and machines. Our artillery was on the move again in hundreds of batteries, and I saw our most advanced field-guns coming into action for the first time in these new positions, and putting up a barrage for a new attack by our infantry to the left of Cambrai, which began when I was on the crest of Bourlon Wood.

It was a fierce and widespread fire, and looking backwards I could see all their gun-flashes winking and blinking above these fields of thistles, and overhead came the rush and clamour of their shells, with a shrill whistling and strange hissing noise, as they seemed to shave the crest of the hillside. Long-nosed 60-pounders squat monsters like 15 inch and 9.2's were pounding away behind, and

almost lifted the roof off one's head when one passed close. The enemy was replying only feebly. He seemed to be moving his guns back again, and into Bourlon Wood there only came shells from one big gun, clanking among undergrowth, and over all our wide tract of newly captured ground on the other side of the Canal-du-Nord there was only harassing fire.

I walked through Bourlon, where there had been bloody fighting. It is a red-brick village, and in old days of peace must have been a beauty-spot on that high hill as it nestled in the arms of the forest. It is all smashed now, but its white château has escaped total destruction, and still stands enough to show its architecture, like a mediæval house, with a pointed turret. Here and there a group of little old houses and barns nestle in the deep foliage, looking undamaged until one passes close, and in the north side of the wood there is a big red factory, with vast shell-holes through its walls. To-day, so soon after the capture of this place, London 'buses drove through Bourlon village to carry back our wounded, and that seemed to me a proof of victory which London people would like to know.

All the ground that we have captured since yesterday is alive with the activity of men who to-day have gone much further, and who do not want to stop to-morrow; they are in a hurry to get ahead. They were jovial at finding themselves so far forward from their old camping grounds of the day before yesterday, but settled down for a brief spell in "bivvies" and holes. I saw a group of gunners who had just come up and were waiting for orders for a new barrage-fire, spread out a blanket and take their places for a game of cards. Two dead horses were a few yards away and other bodies were nearby, but these men paid no heed to the tragedy of the war—they know they must not—and settled down to a jolly game before they had to work again.

Wherever I went to-day, through little woods and down sunken roads and through such smashed villages as Inchy

and Mœuvres, I passed German prisoners straggling back in small parties, led by a small Canadian escort or unaccompanied. Through tall thistles and among shell-craters small processions of German stretcher-bearers walked slowly with their loads, followed by walking wounded with bandaged heads and bloody faces. Up to Friday evening the Canadian Corps had some 3000 prisoners in their hands, and to-day the number went up to over 4000, with over 100 guns. The British divisions had taken 8000 in this Cambrai battle in the same time, and we have all told up to Saturday afternoon more than 200 German guns.

The plan of yesterday's battle was difficult to carry out, as I explained in my message yesterday, owing to the narrow way by which our troops had to cross the Canal-du-Nord. The Canadians on the left, with our British 11th Division north of them, had only 3000 yards in width for their first passage, but once across they fanned out to some 9000 yards, with three divisions of Canadians, the 1st, 3rd, and 4th, covering that front and passing through each other to further objectives north and south of Bourlon. The enemy failed utterly to stop their crossing of the canal, and they did a most difficult military feat with a brilliant success and discipline which proves their long training and experience.

SUNDAY

OUR progress all along the line, from the Arras-Cambrai road down to the neighbourhood of La Vacquerie, was continued yesterday with hard fighting opposite our Third Army front, and this morning our Fourth Army, south of that battle area, delivered an attack on a wide front, extending the zone of conflict across the Canal-du-l'Escaut, north of St.-Quentin, and breaking through that part of the Hindenburg line, with its most formidable defences.

This new attack began this morning in a dense fog. It was so thick that when I went up to Le Verguier and the ground which looked straight across the canal, I could not

see the length of a gun-team ahead. The frost in the night was evaporated by the sun, which rose brightly above this ground-mist and made a thick haze, which was filled with the smoke of guns and the smoke-screens put up to hide the movements of our Tanks and infantry. It produced weird effects such as I have never seen in this war. Bodies of men were moving in close array, following up the first assault columns, but they could only be seen as through a glass darkly, and no man was visible twenty paces ahead. The gun transport and batteries moved up tracks towards the canal, crossing at Bellenglise, and, as the mist shifted for a moment, one saw them as ghost figures of men and beasts, and then a minute later they disappeared, and one seemed in utter loneliness except for the sound of wheels going over rough ground, and the tramp of horses' hoofs and the march of men. Everywhere, hidden in this fog, were guns. They were in the sunken road, and in folds of the fields, and out in the open country, and under cover of the woods. But one could see nothing of them, nor even the flash of them, but hear only their vast tumult of fire and the rush of their shells overhead. There was something very horrible in this darkness and noise. It was like an infernal nightmare, with hell let loose around one. It was impossible to know one's whereabouts or to gauge one's risks of hostile fire.

There were hundreds of guns firing on this southern front. They had been firing this morning when the attack began for forty-eight hours without cessation, and for ten hours our gunners fired gas shells over the German lines, so that we must have spread a zone of death over a wide territory. A thousand rounds of that gas shell were flung over the German batteries and assembly places. Then the assault began with a few minutes' hurricane bombardment before infantry moved forward behind a creeping barrage. A hundred Tanks or so had gone far forward in the night, hiding themselves until they crawled out at the first glimpse of light to-day, and with

the infantry made for the Canal de l'Escaut, or Scheldt, as we call it, which is sixty yards wide where it goes above-ground. To cross it would be a military feat as great as anything in the history of the war, more difficult even than crossing the Canal-du-Nord, which our men did on Friday morning last. For five kilometres north of Bellicourt the canal goes underground, but this was defended by the Hindenburg line with immense belts of wire and deep, wide trenches and a network of earthworks.

On the extreme right of our line English divisions—South Midland, with the 1st and 6th Divisions from left to right—set out to gain the crossings by Bellenglise, and to build bridges to carry Tanks and guns. The enemy knew our attack was imminent. We had warned him by all our fire. To check it he fired heavily back last night, and this morning, especially in Ascension Valley, but this shelling was powerless to break our plans, and the German gun-power was feeble compared with our terrific bombardment which opened on him this morning with hurricane fire after those two days of steady slogging. Through the white fog went our men and our Tanks, and at 7.25, not much more than an hour after the attack began, it was reported back to their headquarters that they had secured the crossing, and were well on the other side of the canal, with many prisoners in the hands of the South Midland men. Some of our men say that they actually swam the canal under cover of the fog, and in ice-cold water. The main Hindenburg line on this sector was broken through, and our troops are so much past it at many points that it is now only of ironical memory, and the enemy must rely on mythical lines to hide his fears and his defeat.

I saw many batches of prisoners coming back from the canal banks with wet chalk on their uniforms, but chalk no whiter than the faces of these men, who had been under two days' bombardment, and had been almost maddened by it, or at least stunned and dazed. Our English Tommies, grouped round their forward cages, all vague

in mist, shouted out questions to the prisoners as they came up, and made cheery remarks to them as though to ease them of their fears. It was a queer scene, in the midst of fog, and more fantastic than anything I have seen on the days of battle.

North of our 9th Corps on the right of the attack, Australians and Americans stormed the canal, where a thousand yards were above ground on their front, and a thousand yards below north and south of Bellicourt. Their left boundary was just below Vendheuile, where other English troops formed a flank and tried to bridge the canal. The line in front of the American-Australian front was terrific in its original strength, for besides the wide canal there was a great belt of wire and many trenches. However, this morning the wire had been well cut by our guns, and Tanks were with our men to force the passage beyond and kept down machine-gun fire, if they could get across. They went across by the marvellous valour of our men, who established their bridges in spite of the heavy German barrage. This, by good luck, fell mostly behind them, and a few of our wounded were hurt in their desperate eagerness to keep close to our own barrage-fire, the Americans being less experienced in this than the Australians, who are mostly veterans. Notwithstanding our annihilating bombardment, there was fierce machine-gun fire from the enemy, and our troops had hard going at first, but then broke down all resistance, and, having passed to the other side of the canal, went ahead, with Tanks round Bony and Bellicourt, where they had their worst fighting, and towards the next organized line of German resistance, known as the Masnières-Beaurevoir line. Prisoners taken on our side of this say that up to that time this line was not manned, but observers report a rapid movement of German trains westward, showing that the enemy are rushing up reinforcements to hold this position, where probably a battle will be fought. Once through that line we are out in the open country, and anything may happen then. Further

north still other English troops were advancing upon the Gouzeaucourt-Masnières road by way of La Vacquerie, where there was such desperate fighting last November. It was strongly held again, and stubbornly defended, but out men broke into the sunken road north and south of it, and pinched it out, and over a thousand prisoners were taken this morning on that front.

New Zealanders passed through Lancashire troops, and fanned out in a wide patrol, moving forward and driving the enemy before them. Gouzeaucourt and Villers-Guislan below them were taken this morning by English divisions, who advanced over Welsh ridge, from which they had been driven back yesterday. They went through the two villages without encountering much opposition, the enemy having fled except for a small group of panic-stricken men, and they then advanced on the strong position of Gonnelieu, where they had very bitter fighting and were held up by savage machine-gun fire. They fell back a little in order to wait for Tanks to destroy those machine-gun nests, and it is reported that things have gone in our favour in that neighbourhood.

Following the battle still northwards, our 6th Corps was heavily engaged to-day round Masnières and Lateau Wood, where, in the Cambrai salient last November, our 29th Division—Guernseys, and Middlesex, and Royal Fusiliers—fought to the death. Once again the outskirts of Masnières became a German shambles, and in that alleyway of ruined houses called Les Rues Vertes English troops fought with great determination and broke the enemy. Meanwhile our 63rd Naval Division, who have been fighting so long and so hard since their capture of Quéant and Pronville many days ago, now stormed the German defences round Lateau Wood, which is now in their hands. Our 6th Corps have counted 4000 prisoners since Friday morning. The regiment of Yorkshiremen who captured Marcoing, and one of their battalions, the 5th, Duke of Wellington's, forced the passage of the Canal-de-Lescaut

in this neighbourhood by very glorious courage under heavy fire. Other divisions cleared the west bank of the canal as far north as La Folie Wood, and are reported to have captured the village of the Noyelles, where they had to sustain fierce counter-attacks. West of Marcoing our brave old 3rd Division, on the right of the Guards, went through the Hindenburg support line and worked forward on Friday and Saturday from Flesquières Ridge and took a record number of prisoners for one division in this battle.

The Guards themselves fought according to their old traditions, and have done great work in smashing through their part of the Hindenburg line, pressing on to Orival Wood and Primy Chapel, and clearing the Bapaume-Cambrai road. On the left of the attack the Canadians and the 11th English Division are still advancing north of Cambrai and putting that city within their grip by an encircling movement. After their wonderful passage of the Canal-du-Nord on Friday morning between Mœuvres and Inchy they fought and beat many battalions of German divisions who had intended to attack them, as I mentioned in my message yesterday, and now came against them in desperate counter-attacks. The 187th German Division and the 7th Cavalry Division had been ordered to take back the line of the canal, and the Canadians went right through them and took prisoners of all their battalions. Then they came in touch with the 12th German Division and part of the 58th, who had been thrown in to attack Bourlon, and were broken by the Canadians before they knew they were so close.

There was hard fighting yesterday round the villages of Raillencourt and Sailly, where, as I have described in another message, I saw the enemy pouring shell-fire into the streets. It was here that the enemy established himself in a line of trenches guarded by belts of wire, which were broken down by our Tanks, as I was told by their crews, whom I met near Bourlon Wood. Canadians made a gap through this line and went through. To-day they are now

swinging well north of Cambrai through the village of Blecourt, north of Thilloy, and towards Ramillies; and for any Germans left in Cambrai there is no hope but a quick escape. Some of them have already escaped with as much booty as they can take, judging from what I saw yesterday as I looked down into the city from ground north of Bourlon Wood. Out of Cambrai came a German train. It was a train in a hurry, and with full steam up and white smoke trailing far behind raced away to the hinterland, where there is more safety for German staff officers.

This is only a bare outline of the great battle which has already been decided in our favour and has given us thousands of prisoners, many guns, and the Hindenburg line for many miles. Of all the human element I can say only a few words, though I should like to write about the courage and splendour of all our men, who have the spirit of victory in their hearts and are taking all risks and daring everything with an eager desire to press on and on. It is a mighty labour, for fighting is hard work all the time, and not joyous excitement, as some folks think. It is the surge and struggle forward of hundreds of thousands of men down narrow ways choked with traffic, over fields under fire, through ruined villages, into which shells are falling, or where they may fall at any second. It is the labour of moving guns over rough ground with mules and horses which have been going many days so that some of them drop dead, and there is a trail of dead horses, of whom some have been killed by shrapnel and some by shells and some by bombs. It is the labour of armies of men making roads through ground just captured, and pushing out railway lines into deeper desolation. It is the labour of engineers and pioneers making the way of the Army straight, and, lastly, it is the labour of gunners and infantry hungry for want of sleep, but not sleeping; disgusted with their dirtiness, but unable to wash; firing their guns until they are red-hot, then moving to fire on new targets, and, if they are infantry, marching, marching, marching in support

of those in front, and passing through them to new attacks; resisting counter-attacks when they have won a battle, having no chance of rest until they, in turn, are "leap-frogged" by comrades coming up behind. The gunner officers are hoarse with shouting orders and haggard from lack of sleep. The infantry officers snatch sleep, if they can, in any ditch or behind any broken wall while shells are bursting very close and their men are digging a little cover before the next advance. It is superhuman effort of physical strength and will-power, but throughout our armies, as I have seen them during the last three days, there is a grim sense of getting the enemy on the run and smashing him so beyond recovery that ever after this he will have to go back and back before us until he is cleared out of Belgium and France.

The news from the north is astounding and good. The Belgians are reported to have Dixmude—that Dixmude which I saw in flames four years ago and entered on a day of tragedy. We have the Flanders ridges again and thousands of prisoners who held them, and, after all, that bloody fighting of last year from Ypres to Passchendaele has not been made vain by the loss of all that ground, but is ours after a brief tenure by the enemy. In this last three days, most successful in all these years of war, we have struck the enemy a smashing and decisive blow from the sea to St.-Quentin, and his Hindenburg line is now a farce—a farce and a tragedy which will shock the people of Germany to their hearts, because it breaks their last hope of safety. They know they are beaten. In every cage there are many officers, some of them of high rank, like one I saw yesterday, who was the commander of a German cavalry regiment taken by the Canadians. He praised our leadership and our men's fighting quality, and was very polite and humble—new qualities of German officers who come into our hands. Those I saw to-day, fresh from the Hindenburg line across the canal by St.-Quentin, saluted as men who raise their hands to the victors.

To-day's battle, fought in a fog, made news difficult to get by our Army commanders. Our airmen were out before the dawn, or just after dawn, as I saw them winding up to go, but they could see nothing for several hours through that dense ground haze, though the sky was blue above them. But afterwards, when the mist lifted like a curtain, revealing all the drama of battle, they flew low and swooped over our infantry to read their signals, and then came back with good tidings. One of them came to a corps headquarters and dropped his message just outside the hut of the General Staff officers, who were hungry for his news. The sky this morning was crowded with these scouts of ours, like midges on a summer day, and before the fog had cleared it was strange to hear their engines singing up there above the darkness on earth. When the sun rose and lifted that curtain of mist, flooding all the fields with golden light, a French officer with me raised his hand, smiled, and said in a voice of emotion, "The sun of Austerlitz, the herald of great victory." It has indeed been a day of victory, and we should be thankful to the men—those English and Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and American troops—who have by enormous courage and enduring fatigue, gained this new success for the world, bringing nearer a vision of all good things when there shall be an end of this.

II

The End of the Hindenburg Line

October 1

There was wild weather last night, with a gale of wind blowing and heavy rainstorms over the battlefields. I was in a place where there are many ruined houses, and as the wind howled there were crashes when bits of masonry fell into the streets. It was bitterly cold to our brave troops,

and this morning some of them I met had chattering teeth after a night without sleep. But they endure these discomforts bravely, and the vision of victory keeps them warm in soul, if not in body.

"My men," said an officer of our 3rd Division to-day, "keep asking me when they are going on again. That is their one thought." Yet these men of the "Iron Division," as it is called, because of their great history in this war, have been fighting a long time, in our retreat and in our advance, and were many days in the line before their new attack last Friday, their most glorious day when they took as many prisoners as a corps would be proud to take on one day, and went straight through the Hindenburg support line to the left of Havrincourt.

North-country troops and Royal Fusiliers stormed the Hindenburg trenches, and after hard fighting all the way with troops of the 20th and 6th German Divisions, their best troops in this sector, captured the village of Ribecourt on their final objective. Scottish and Shropshire men worked on the left, and smashed their way through the most formidable trench systems with the aid of Tanks, whose pilots and crews did gallant service, and were then "leap-frogged" by North and East Country troops of this same old division, who went through Flesquières village. They took three German battalion commanders among that vast crowd of men, whom they bundled back behind our lines. The Guards were on their left, and the Guards and the 3rd Division together can take anything with any luck.

The depth of the German defence, without these battalions supporting each other, showed that the enemy intended to hold this part of the Hindenburg line at all costs; but that intention failed, with a crushing defeat. Round Cambrai to-day and last night, after my message yesterday, there was very hard fighting, and the enemy's resistance has been stiffened by rushing up local reserves, although while those are broken there can be very little behind and

between our troops and the open country. But for the time being their defence is strong and hard, maintained almost wholly by dense machine-gun fire against our 11th English Division and the 1st, 4th, and 3rd Canadian Divisions, who have been making their way stubbornly round the north side of Cambrai.

For a time yesterday the German counter-attacks made the Canadians withdraw a little from St.-Ollé, on the outskirts of the city, and from the ground near Blécourt and Tilloy on the north, but the 1st Canadians have taken the strongly wired trench line west of the Douai-Cambrai road, in spite of fierce machine-gunning, and are making further attacks to-day, which have already given them ground about Blécourt, while the 3rd and 4th Canadians are reported as fighting at Tilloy. The enemy is resisting fiercely on the railway embankment which goes northwards outside Cambrai.

These battles to-day were preceded by heavy concentrations of gun-fire from our batteries sweeping the ground on this side of the Scheldt Canal, behind which Cambrai stands, and when I was below Bourlon Wood this morning—very grim and black there under the rain-swept sky—I saw all these guns of ours open fire, and the flashes made a line of flame between the long slopes of the country here. There was hardly any hostile shell-fire near Cambrai, and the city, with its tall spires, seemed to be isolated from the battle-zone which swept about it.

As I went up this way to-day I met those processions of men who are human and speaking proofs of our progress and success. They were German prisoners, and down one road came nearly a thousand of them, marching as one battalion—victims of yesterday's tragedy to Germany. Their numbers are staggering to the imagination during these last few days, and two young friends of mine whose duty it is to bring some of them by train to the central collecting station have had their hands full. On one day one

of them brought down a large number, and his friend was responsible for 1600, and every day for three days they have entrained the same numbers.

For the most part they give no trouble at all, but on one of these train journeys there was a fierce fight among themselves in one of the trucks, and there are bitter arguments among the men as to the reason of their debacle. Their spirit is breaking. All that I have said recently about the deterioration of German *moral,* the partial cracking of their discipline and war machine, is borne out by German orders captured by the English and Canadian troops. One of them, issued before the beginning of our battle last Friday morning, stated that the Hindenburg line was their winter position, and that not a foot of ground must be lost. That proves the absolute intention of the German command to hold out on this line, and the greatness of the defeat that has come to them. But other orders reveal dismay at the state of mind among their soldiers, and that is our best knowledge. In one issued to the 187th Division, which the Canadians have met and shattered, it says that:

"The *moral* and discipline of our men have plainly decreased, owing in the first place to the system of elastic defence, which leads the men to believe that ground is of no value; and, secondly, to the lack of control and example among the officers. There is also a lack of personality among men shown by unnecessary retirements, the general conduct of men on leave, and riots such as those in Cambrai, where officers joined in the same crimes as the men, similar to those of which we accused the Russians."

In another order, issued three days ago by the Chief of Staff of the 17th German Army, it says that:

"Holding positions lightly leads to failure and discouragement of troops, and this feeling grows as the thinness of our garrisons increases. Unfortunately in addition the *moral* of our men has decreased considerably."

LATER

ONE of the German surprises yesterday was to meet American troops in the attack against them on our front. It was no surprise to some of us, who had seen them moving up day by day nearer to the fighting zone, so that, as we passed them, we said to each other: "These men are out for business, and, by jove, how well they look." These two divisions, with men of New York State and North and South Carolina and Tennessee, were quartered in shell-broken villages full of history made by English troops during these four years of war, so that every ruined cottage in them is scrawled over with English and Scottish names. The Americans had come newly to these places, and they had the look of new men, so fresh, so keen, so unscarred by the tragedy of war, which leaves its imprint on men's faces and gives them a certain look in the eyes not to be mistaken. They looked very young, many of these American boys, but hard and fit, and I watched them putting up their camps and their "pup tents," and going up with their guns and transport to the edge of the battlefield. They drew nearer, and went further into our stricken land among shell-craters and all the wreckage of human life.

Then on the first day of this new battle yesterday I saw some of them coming down with their prisoners, escorting them proudly and smiling back to our Tommies, who said, "Well done, Yanks! That's a good beginning. Keep it up." They came marching through the white fog which veiled everything yesterday morning, and I saw their staff officers driving up sinister roads this side of the Scheldt Canal, and American guns and transport threading their way through our streams of traffic. They were keen to attack, full of confidence and enthusiasm because they believed they would do well and help in a day of big victory, and they led the assault on one sector of the canal by Bellicourt, where the Australians were to pass through them to an extension of the attack later in the day. They went away rapidly, stormed through the German lines, secured

the canal crossings, and struck on towards Gouy and Nauroy, and the only fault to find with them, the only laughing criticism from veterans in our ranks, was that they set the pace too hard and were too eager to get forward. That is a fault on the right side, the gift of the freshers in this hard old university of war, where men learn to be cautious of possible snags and make very sure of the ground behind them before they trudge on again. Their courage yesterday was magnificent, and they went straight into deadly risks without shirking the hazard. They have done and learnt enough in one day to call themselves veterans, for a battle like this crowds much into few hours. One cannot distinguish between the troops in courage and in audacious endeavour, for yesterday the whole Allied line swept forward with marvellous valour. It was one of our big days, and a battle which may have far-reaching results.

One of the finest episodes beyond all doubt was the crossing of the canal by those Midland men of the 46th Division, Leicesters, and Staffords, and others, whom I first met years ago near Armentières. They had to get across the Scheldt Canal by Bellenglise, where it is eighteen yards wide and very deep. German guns were trained upon it, and its banks bristled with machine-guns, and its bridges were mined. But the Midland men went down to that gully of death, went down in the thick white fog through which there was a frightful tumult of guns, as I heard them in the darkness, and through which howled German shells searching for their bodies, and the long tattoo of machine-guns and the swish of thousands of bullets. With lifebelts round their tunics and with small rafts and ladders and sections of wooden bridges they went down to the edge of the canal, not knowing what comrades fell, not pausing. Some of the men went down the chalky banks and plunged into the ice-cold water and swam across under fire, and some used their rafts and built their bridges. The Midland men of the 46th streamed across, and Tanks went with them

to their side of the canal, and in an hour or two, or less, the strongest system of defence on the Western Front had been broken and carried, and the Hindenburg line had been made a byword for ever, and the barrier upon which all German hopes were built was behind our lines, with our men away beyond it. The 46th Division, fanning out as they went over the whole corps front, took over 4000 prisoners and a large number of guns, and as they went into hostile ground and fought those who preferred to fight, they saw the result of the forty-eight hours of bombardment which had gone before their advance, and it was an appalling sight, because of the number of dead who lay everywhere.

Between Bellicourt and Gonnelieu there has been severe fighting against other troops, including Australians and Americans, and between Bony and Villers-Guislain desperate counter-attacks by the enemy pressed back our troops to the western outskirts of those villages. It is the fighting of men who know that the fate of their Fatherland is at stake, and whose moral is not so broken that they cannot rise here and there to very brave resistance. Let us be fair to our enemy now that we are beginning to have him down, and acknowledge what I have said a thousand times, that in spite of many bad qualities he has great courage. If that were not so, it would be no honour to our men to beat him, and his loss of moral comes only when after four years of war he sees his doom near.

I can write very little of the amazing things in the north, for all I know is hearsay, and even that I have not time to tell to-day. But I must write a few words as a tribute to the Belgians, who have come into their own again, and after four years are attacking again as once I saw them fight on the banks of the Yser Canal in the autumn of 1914, when day by day they had many dead and wounded, but held their line. With astonishing speed on the first morning of their attack they drove straight through Houthulst Forest, and took over 200 guns and 5000 pris-

oners. I am told that the German Landwehr fought hard and well against them, but could not check the pace of the Belgian advance, which has carried them to within three kilometres of Roulers. Belgian and British cavalry are spreading out over a wide tract of country in far patrols. And there is a report that the Germans are evacuating Comines. Our troops, including English, Irish, and Scottish battalions, have made quick progress from Armentières northwards, swinging round the Messines Ridge with other troops pushing forward on the extreme left to Adizeele, now in their hands. These troops of ours on the right of the Belgians have taken 3600 prisoners and over 100 guns.

October 2

Violent rain again fell last night, making our battlefield very soft and muddy for troops and transport, especially, I hear, in Flanders, where our Second Army is still making good progress in spite of this trouble, which handicapped us so frightfully last year. On the Cambrai battle-front the ground is not so bad, but, as I can witness from personal experience to-day, the roads and tracks are deep in mud, so that all our seething traffic of men and guns and material of war is a slow-moving tide. After a stormy night, however, the sky cleared, and to-day there is a cloudless blue sky, with far visibility under the splendid sunshine of this first of October, when autumn begins, and the trees of Havrincourt Wood and grim old Bourlon Wood are hung with russet foliage, all tattered by shell-fire.

It is on this front by Cambrai that one of the decisive battles of the war—I think it may be the decisive battle—is being fought. The enemy is putting in all the strength he has to defend this line round Cambrai, fearing that if the English and Canadian spearhead drives deeper above and below that city he may be forced to a full retreat in the open plains, and that all his defensive position may be

turned. From a German map captured by the Canadians we know that he takes this view, and it is proved also by the number of divisions he has now put into this part of the battle-line, and by the orders given them to defend their ground to the death. The Canadian Corps were to-day fighting eight German divisions. And in addition the enemy here have machine-gun detachments from the 7th German Cavalry and the 207th Divisions. After reinforcing their defence by the 12th Division, they have now brought up the 12th Reserve Division, and all of them are fighting hard with most desperate courage.

On the west side of the Canal-de-l'Escaut, which swings in a close loop around Cambrai, the Canadians have been having a hard and fierce battle, which is still in progress, and going in our favour, though not easily nor without cost. Yesterday, under intense German fire from many guns and savage machine-gunning, the Canadians had to draw back again from Blécourt and Abancourt, north of the city, and it was decided by the Canadian command to cease all efforts in this direction until more guns were in position to provide a heavier barrage, behind which their troops could make a stronger advance on the whole corps' front. This was done, and this morning, at five o'clock, after complete reorganization of the artillery and infantry dispositions, not an easy task in the darkness and slashing rain, the new battle began.

Our barrage-fire was intense and murderous, and the enemy replied by a line of fire that was also very fierce. Five minutes after our guns opened their hurricane bombardment with a creeping barrage for our men to follow. The Canadians advanced with the finest courage, and, in spite of this shelling, and intense machine-gunning at closer range, were not baulked of their main purpose. The 3rd Canadian Division, on the right, did all that its men had been asked to achieve, but on the left the troops were held up for a time by a terrible artillery concentration. The 4th Canadian Division have had severe fighting round Cuvillers

and Bantigny, but are securing their positions in that neighbourhood, but the 1st Canadians apparently entered Abancourt, but had to fall back temporarily owing to the girdle of high explosives which barred their way. The village of Thilloy, due north of Cambrai, seems to be in our hands.

On the left of the Canadians English troops of the 11th Division this morning have made progress beyond Fressies, just above Abancourt. The battle is being fought in this evening sunlight out there, which is golden over all those fields of strife, and until nightfall we shall not know the full measure of the day's success, but even now it seems to me certain that the German defences of Cambrai are being broken down by the stubborn effort of our men, fighting against great odds but beating them. The Germans fear that Cambrai will be lost to them, and only a few moments before I wrote my last words in this message news was brought to me that they are burning the city. There was no fire rising from it this morning when I caught a glimpse of its spires and roofs, nor yesterday, when I saw it quite tranquil in the midst of the battle-zone, and then I believed that it would fall into our hands almost unscathed by the war. It seemed to me probable that the enemy would not destroy it when he had to leave, knowing now that he is losing this war, and that it would pay him to leave as many towns intact as possible on the wake of his retreat, lest he should incur retribution at the hands of those who will have power over him. But he does not learn. There is something in his character that does not let him learn, and the fires that are now in Cambrai, that old, fair city, crowded with historical memories of France, prove once again that in retreat, as well as in advance, the enemy is ruthless, and will lay waste the ground behind him. No words that I can write will alter his purpose, but, for what it is worth, I warn him that such acts as this, coming after all his destruction through which, day after day, we pass, as through a land of ancient ruin dead since a thousand years ago, will be punished.

It is proof of victory when the Canadian Corps alone, with our two English divisions working with them, have captured since the beginning of their advance in August 450 guns and 27,000 prisoners. In this one battle, beginning last Friday, they have captured 150 guns. And the corps further south, our 6th Corps, has in less time than that taken prisoners 376 German officers and 14,089 men. It is this 6th Corps, commanded by General Haldane, which is fighting south of Cambrai, where, as I wrote in my message yesterday, our Guards and 2nd Division, with the 62nd Yorkshire Division and our "Iron" Division—the old 3rd—have fought so long and so doggedly in all these battles between Bapaume and Marcoing. While the Canadians are fighting on the north of Cambrai these others are drawing closer on the south of the city and smashing the last German defences there across the canal, along the Masnières-Beaurevoir line, and in the neighbourhood of Rumilly, which is their strong point of resistance. It was the leading brigade of Yorkshires of the 62nd Division which took Marcoing last Sunday, when, at the end of a hard day's battle, the Duke of Wellington battalions, with amazing dash, worked forward and seized the salient east of Marcoing.

Our 2nd Division did brave work in gaining the bridgehead across the canal east of Noyelles, where the cutting is deep and wide, with shelving banks bricked up, so that it is a terrible place to cross under fire. The enemy kept it under fire and had observation of our men from a high mound south of Cambrai called Mont-sur-l'Œuvres (the "Mound above the Works"). This knoll is a commanding position in this neighbourhood, and as long as the enemy held that it was difficult to attack or hold the village of Rumilly, south-east of it above Masnières. Yesterday the Yorkshires of the 62nd Division made two attacks upon Rumilly, where last November in the first Cambrai fighting there was a race between German infantry and ours, and because the Germans were first to the line our cavalry could

not pass through. Once again Rumilly proved hard to take, and the Yorkshire attacks failed to make much progress because of the "Mound above the Works," from which the German machine-gunners directed their fire. Their comrades on the right of them were able to advance above Crévecœur, which was being attacked by New-Zealanders, and swung forward into the sunken road which strikes straight up from Crévecœur across a spur of ground thrust forward above that village. But their flank was threatened owing to the enemy still being in Rumilly, and this morning, much against their will, they were drawn back in order to make room for a creeping barrage, behind which the New-Zealanders were going to attack Crévecœur and this ground again, while the 2nd Division on the left rushed the "Mound above the Works," and others drove through Rumilly itself.

This was the tactical arrangement of battle this morning and all our troops made good progress and broke down the first German resistance. Against them they had the 3rd German Naval Division, who are fighting courageously. If we gain this line of German defence and hold it against local counter-attacks while the Canadians on the north of Cambrai drive their spearhead just a little deeper the Germans will be in a tragic plight, and their retreat here seems certain. Whether they will stop, except for rear-guard actions, is difficult for us to say, and more difficult for them, for the barrier they have built against us, and believed they would hold intact, has already been breached, their Hindenburg line is full of holes, through which our men have poured, and, like a tide, our Army will move after them as it is now moving, slowly, but with a steady and fearful weight.

On our right, where the Australians and Americans were fighting across the canal on Sunday beyond Bellicourt and Bellenglise, there was a new attack to-day to consolidate and improve the gains made on Sunday and Monday, when luck was not altogether ours, and the stubborn resistance

of the enemy in some of his old trench systems, where he held out after the beginning of our advance, created for a time a different situation. The enemy was able to hold on to the village of Bony, towards which the Australians tried to bomb their way, and were also strong in Gouy, towards which the Americans had gone forward with such enthusiasm and rapidity, meeting a terrible machine-gun fire on their way with hidden machine-gun nests all about them. This morning the battle began again, and the Australians attacked in a more northerly direction towards Estrées, Joncourt, and Levergies. They also drove up towards Gouy from the south. The first results are good, and the Australians are reported to have captured Estrées and Joncourt and the high crest known as Mill Ridge, between Bony and Estrées, so that they seem to be in a splendid position for further progress, and have put the enemy into extreme danger. The Australians had taken 2000 prisoners in the operation last Sunday, and this morning they must have increased that number by many more, because the Germans were holding all this ground strongly, with close reserves. They have fought stubbornly, especially between Nauroy and Estrées, and the Australians had a hard fight at the point known as Camp Signal station, in this neighbourhood.

The enemy's losses have been severe, and have drained his Divisions so that they are much below strength, and some of their units hardly exist. An officer of the 2nd Prussian Guard, who came over to our lines, said his own regiment was down to a strength of four companies, and he had advised his men to surrender to us if hard pressed.

To-day is a critical one in this Battle of Cambrai. Our heroic men, tired with long fighting, and weakened by inevitable losses during the past eight weeks, are still keen to follow up their pursuit of the enemy, so that he shall not have time to rest and refresh and grow strong again, and they are eager to smash his defences, so that he shall be forced into a last long retreat which will end only with

the ending of the war—that is our men's hope and purpose —and if to-day and to-morrow they can beat him where he now stands, there is no prepared inch where the German army may stand, because we have driven him out of his last continuous defences, organized as unbreakable positions. The officers I have seen to-day directing this battle, and others seen by my fellow war correspondents, are hopeful and confident, and it is their belief that their men will deliver this death-blow to the hopes of the German High Command.

There are great scenes on our roads and over the newly captured fields below Bourlon Wood. Our supporting troops are marching forwards with their bands playing them up, and the golden sunlight of this day gleams upon long columns of men in steel helmets swinging up to the lines, and for miles up the wet tracks there are tides of guns and transport wagons. All this life of a great army —where do all our men come from after these years of fighting?—surges through ruined villages where not a wall stands solid, and through that vast desolation that stretches out from Amiens across the battlefields of the Somme and these new fields of ours where there are still unburied dead and the recent relics of frightful strife. One cannot write these things in prose. At least not in the haste of a newspaper message, but the pictures of all this drama of battle stay in one's mind, so that one dreams of them and hears even in one's sleep the tramp of many battalions, and the rumbling of many gun-wheels over rough and stony ways, and the slogging of the guns north and south of Bourlon Wood, where the roads go up to that city of Cambrai which is now in flames.

October 3

The Battle of Cambrai continues, with intense and desperate fighting on both sides. The Canadians on the north, by Thilloy, Blécourt, and other villages on the outskirts of the city, say that in the last two days they have

had harder fighting than in any other battle since they have been in France, and all the world knows how hard they have fought since their first days round Ypres. South of the city our English divisions have had fighting just as desperate, and our efforts have been resisted by many German divisions thrown in hurriedly after our advance on Sunday last, all of whom have fought with determined spirit, knowing how much is at stake if they fail here.

When I went up the Bapaume-Cambrai road this morning, as its strikes east of Bourlon Wood through Fontaine-Notre-Dame, I was so close to the city round which this battle is raging that I could see very clearly its roofs and spires, which were shining in the morning sunlight. After the news I had yesterday when I wrote my message I expected to see Cambrai in flames to-day. But I could see no red fire there, and only clouds of white smoke rising from the south and north-west sides, and I now understand that these are probably from stores which the enemy is burning down by the candle factory and by the canal docks, and so far he has not set the town alight as a whole. He has deliberately destroyed the churches in the suburbs of Sailly and Raillencourt, leaving slow-burning fuses attached to high explosives when he retreated from those places, so that they went up in explosion on Monday and yesterday. In one suburb an officer went to sleep in a dug-out, and was awakened next morning by an engineer, who told him that he had been sleeping on two bags of dynamite to which a fuse was attached, but by good luck it was not burning.

On the south side of Cambrai, when I was up there this morning, beyond Graincourt and Flesquières, there was very little artillery fire on either side. Earlier in the morning, when Royal Scottish Fusiliers and Shropshire Light Infantry were attacking Rumilly again after frightful fighting among its ruins, the German gunners flung over large numbers of heavy shells, so that the ground was all upheaved by them; but these had now quietened down owing

to the advance of our troops eastwards from Rumilly, so that the enemy was pulling back his heavies again to prevent their capture. He has lost too many guns of late to risk those that remain to him in this sector, and on the ground across which I went to-day there were several abandoned batteries and broken guns lying about among those heroic old Tanks of ours that were disabled by a German artillery major serving his gun with open sights when they advanced over Flesquières last year. Since then, and in the last few days, this ground has been strewn with every imaginable kind of wreckage which belongs to bloody fighting, and it is plain to see on every yard of soil how desperately the enemy resisted our progress here.

The battle this morning on this southern side of Cambrai was being fought by infantry without much artillery support, as it was close fighting in the suburbs of the city, where a long street called the Faubourg-de-Paris strikes out of Cambrai into the open fields, and where every house in it is a machine-gun fort. To the right the ridge for which our men fought this morning up to Rumilly was also quiet, though all through the night until after a new advance of ours at dawn it was on fire with bursting shells. I saw the ruins of the village of Rumilly close to a belt of slaughtered trees, and from its neighbourhood there came the slashing sound of intense machine-gun fire. Across the field-tracks our men were marching to support their comrades in that open country, and behind them some guns of ours, big fellows, who split the sky with their noise when they fire, were moving slowly forward and taking up new positions, so that for a little time they were silent. Three of our kite balloons were amazingly far forward over Bourlon Wood, staring down into the German lines and taking the risk of German shrapnel, which was bursting about them. Their observers had to take to their parachutes twice yesterday when a German fighting scout circled round them and was only driven off in the nick of time by one of our air patrols.

Away north there was also unusual quietude after a fierce bombardment lasting for two days, and here there is close fighting in the northern suburbs of Cambrai. It is here that the Canadians have been fighting in their greatest struggle against massed reserves of the enemy, who has tried to bear them down by weight of numbers, by superiority of machine-gun fire, and by fierce counter-attacks forced hard by men brought fresh into this infernal struggle. Against the Canadians and the English division on their left the Germans now have nine divisions, reinforcing those I have mentioned in other messages by the 1st Guards Reserve and 18th Reserve Divisions, with thirteen marksmen detachments and the artillery of thirteen divisions and a machine-gun strength giving them four light and four heavy machine-guns to each company front—a strong sweep of fire in close-range fighting.

All day yesterday there was ceaseless and severe struggle on both sides, and after the Canadian attack in the early morning, when they gained ground at Ramillies, Cuvillers, and Blécourt, and entered Morenchies and Abancourt, the Germans counter-attacked again and again with almost fanatical courage. They advanced in close formations down the valleys of Bantigny and Paillencourt, and were seen by the Canadian observers, who called to the Canadian guns. Our artillery had human targets at short range, and fired for hours with open sights. Their shells raked the German ranks, tore gaps in them, and laid out men in heaps. Others came up to take their place and struggle on to break the Canadian lines, and again the guns got them for their targets and killed large numbers of them. There was a massacre of men in those valleys, and our guns were served until they were too hot to fire. But still, under cover of sunken roads and embankment cuttings, the German infantry made their way, regardless of all losses, and forced a passage into some of the ruined villages, which the Canadians had captured that morning by most resolute spirit, though many of their comrades fell,

and succeeded in making some of the Canadian battalions fall back to the outskirts of those places. One party of Canadians were isolated near Cuvillers, and were in a most perilous situation for some hours, but they had no thought of surrender, and held on to their ground and obtained touch with their main line before the day was done. All Canadians say that the number of German dead strewn about this ground is horrible to see, but they have taken this toll of the enemy not without paying a severe price themselves for the ground they still hold, and after all their days of fighting since their first glorious advance south of Amiens on August 8, their present actions are a marvellous achievement.

On the south side of Cambrai our English, Scottish, and Irish troops, with New Zealanders to the south of them by Crévecœur, have had hard days also, but have made further progress this morning. It was our 63rd Naval Division with the 57th who on Sunday last secured the bridgeheads across the Scheldt (Escaut) Canal at Noyelles, and north and south of Noyelles. It was a desperate enterprise, only done by the extraordinary heroism of simple soldiers and young officers and non-commissioned officers, who would not be checked by losses or deadly risk.

The Hoods, the Hawkes, and the Drakes, who had taken Graincourt and La Folie Wood by a severe struggle, were the men of the Naval Division who seized the bridgeheads over the canal and made their way across. On the other banks were German machine-gunners who could see every movement of them, and when some of our men put narrow planks over and tried to cross, swept them off by a stream of bullets. But other men followed on, and some of them dodged the bullets, and some waded, and some swam, and at last our men were able to form up in something like a line, and broke into a charge forward to the high ground south of Cambrai. They went on to a small wood called Paris Copse, which they took, but with the 57th Division they were held up for a time by a trench south of

Proville. They made repeated efforts to get astride the road cut straight up from Rumilly to Cambrai, but it was held with a machine-gun to every yard, and in face of this fire they could not advance. One body of men from the Naval Division worked up towards the Faubourg-de-Paris, which, as I have said, juts out of Cambrai, but here again there was a machine-gun in every bit of ruin, and they had to call a halt after desperate efforts to carry the street by assault.

Further north English and Irish troops who fought with grim and dogged valour made more progress, and captured the outer line of what are known as the inner defences of Cambrai, east of Proville, which had been cleared by the gallantry of the 57th Division. As showing the spirit of these men it is astounding but true that two companies of Ansons, after all their fighting, became restless when our barrage-fire started for the 57th's attack on Proville, and, as one of their officers puts it, they joined in the hunt, though it was outside their boundary. The ground all about here is frightful for attack, as it makes an open glacis, falling down to the outskirts of Cambrai, where our men come under the full sweep of the German machine-gun fire, and then rises up steeply to the Faubourg-de-Paris.

Meanwhile, south of all this the 3rd Division, with the 2nd Division on their left, were endeavouring to gain possession of Rumilly, for which our 62nd Division of Yorkshires had fought until they were utterly exhausted by lack of sleep and any kind of rest. Rumilly was stuffed with machine-guns and protected by bits of trench and barbed-wire defences, behind which there were many German machine-gunners, of the 5th Bavarian Division brought up fresh for this purpose. These men fought to the death. It was necessary to kill them in order to take their ground, and many were killed. They had been ordered to attack us and drive our men back across the canal, but the glorious old 3rd Division were the first to attack yesterday

morning, and all day the fighting went on in a bitter and bloody way. In one trench west of Rumilly our men captured twenty machine-guns, and in the village there were many more. They were the Suffolks and others who made the first assault on Rumilly yesterday morning, having to get across the canal to reach their fighting-line under heavy fire. But for all their courage and obstinacy in fearful hours they could not get Rumilly, and their main trouble came from fire from the neighbourhood of that hill called Mont-sur-l'Œuvres (the Mound above the Works), which I mentioned yesterday. Here the 2nd Division were trying to get possession of the hill, and when they succeeded, after gallant attempts, it relieved the situation for the "Iron Division" further down.

But it was not until the early hours of this morning that Rumilly was finally taken by a different method of assault. Royal Scottish Fusiliers and Shropshire Light Infantry worked round on the east side of the village and outflanked it on that side, while other men of the 3rd Division swung through the village from the north-west. Up to last night their division had captured twelve officers and 453 men in the ding-dong fighting of the day, and this morning they have many more. The 3rd Division is now advancing into open country beyond that Rumilly switch-line which was the enemy's last organized system of defence, in touch with the New Zealanders on their right.

As I have said, the Bavarians are fighting with fierce spirit, and one of our officers to-day told me that when a British Tank advanced upon one of their machine-gun nests near Rumilly the gunners fired until it was right on their emplacement, and one man actually refused to release his weapon until the Tank had passed over both his legs. One curious incident happened to two of our Red Cross ambulances, showing the daring of their drivers in following up an advance to rescue the wounded. Believing that Rumilly was ours yesterday, the officer in charge of these ambulances drove straight for the village and was only

made aware of the situation when machine-gun bullets whipped all round him and a body of Germans rushed out to seize the cars. He was hit by a bullet just below the waist, and it travelled round his side and came out through his left arm. Badly wounded as he was, he made a dash for escape, and got away until he fell unconscious some distance from the German lines. But he remembers seeing some of the enemy soldiers jump on to the ambulances and drive them into Rumilly. What happened to the other driver of ours I do not know.

The strength of German resistance round Cambrai is so stiffening and so obstinate now that their troops are reinforced by divisions brought down from Flanders and elsewhere, that it becomes clear we shall not capture the city without further fighting of a severe nature, and in spite of the loop we have flung round it is possible that the enemy will cling to it for some days at least. Indeed, it is likely that they may counter-attack on a heavy scale, in order to thrust us from its approaches, though that would be hard to do.

Farther south, there was a new attack to-day by Australian and English divisions, who have pushed forward a little beyond Levergies and near Ramicourt. Here also the Germans are rushing up reinforcements. On the right we are in touch with the French Army, who are now well established in St.-Quentin and across its canal to the north. St.-Quentin has suffered badly, and some of its streets have been already gutted by fire. Never again will the world see the glory of that cathedral nor the beauty of its old houses.

III

The Way to Le Cateau

October 4

By out attack this morning across the St.-Quentin-Scheldt Canal south of Cambrai, where our men have taken many

prisoners and broken into the country about Le Catelet, we have succeeded in driving the enemy still farther away from his main defensive lines, and if we have luck we may force him into a retreat to Le Cateau, and by cutting his line of communications across the road which goes that way, compel him to abandon Cambrai. Owing to our constant pressure north and south of the battle-front he is already in wide retreat from his La Bassée salient. God forbid that we should give ourselves up at this time of day, after frightful disappointments through many years of effort, to rosy and optimistic dreams not based on reality or truth, but this at least we may say—we are on the eve of amazing possibilities, and perhaps there may be open to us a supreme chance of bringing this war to decisive issues.

It will not be our fault if we miss this chance. Does the world even now understand what these troops of ours have done and are still doing? I think not, for even we who are among them out here, who follow their battles, and go through the battlefields, can hardly realize the heights of endurance which these men have achieved. It is now October, and the soldiers who are advancing to-day belong to the same divisions as those who fought back in desperate rear-guard actions when the enemy flung his massed armies against them in March. These are men of the same divisions who fought in the beginning of our offensive battles when the tide turned in August, and every day since then, or almost every day, have fought forward through trench systems and village fortresses against the desperate resistance of the German troops until they have thirty miles of liberated land behind them from Albert to Le Catelet, and every mile of it is strewn with relics of their frightful strife. They have lost many comrades on the way—this wake of war is scattered over with little white crosses—and new drafts have come out to fill up the gaps, but the spirit of the old divisions goes on, and the new boys mingle with veterans not much older than themselves and carry on the tradition.

They are just working men of England and the Colonies, farmers and factory hands, clerks and office boys, and lads who were at school four years ago, and in their steel helmets and their khaki, with dust and mud on them, they are all reduced to a dead level of humanity and discipline, and one sees no difference between them. One young Tommy trudging along the road is the type of all British Tommies; one lean Australian stands for all Australia; one Canadian for all Canada. But in this mass of men there has been revealed anew in recent weeks a high and wonderful average of courage and devotion to some ideal that burns inwards and does not flame in their eyes or in their speech, and day after day they fight and trudge on through fields of fire, and, whether death may or may not await them, whether they have few hours' sleep or no sleep, whether their bones ache with fatigue or their bodies are weak with the burden of toil, they keep going until they reach the breaking-point which is in human nature. Knowing the frightful hours ahead of them, they go towards the enemy's guns. Knowing the full cost of victory, they go and claim it. There are cowards among them, no doubt, and they are all afraid —because there is nothing funny in shell-fire—but they kill their cowardice by some magic they have, and many who are most afraid do the most heroic things.

Not only the men, but their young officers and their headquarters staffs, do not spare themselves to the last spark of vitality, and a tribute is due to those brigade, divisional, corps, and Army staffs who have been toiling for victory, and what comfort and help they can give their men. In the old days of trench warfare they lived in châteaux of France, behind the lines, and were targets of satire because of their comfort. There is precious little comfort for them now, and corps flags and divisional flags fly over holes in the ground, amidst old trenches and old ruins, and generals and their officers are very far forward with hostile fire digging pits about them, while in German dug-outs abandoned by the enemy they direct battles within sight of

them, and snatch a few hours' sleep in some narrow bunk between oozy walls, if they have the luck to sleep. Every other day now they have to shift their lodgings in the earth to some spot farther forward, and yesterday, for instance, I met a general washing outside his dug-out like a private soldier who only a week or so before I had met in a dark cave fifteen miles back, which is a long way for men to fight when every yard of it is under fire.

So the whole Army is animated by a single purpose of grim endeavour to make haste to victory, so that the world may get back to its sane life and men to their women and babes, after these years of exile and agony.

I have already written an account of the astounding feat of our 46th Midland Division, who on Sunday last flung themselves across the Scheldt Canal at Bellenglise and captured 4200 prisoners, great numbers of guns, and over 1000 machine-guns. But further details that come from those Leicesters, Staffords, and Sherwood Foresters increase the marvel of this achievement, which will rank in history as one of the most heroic episodes of this war. These men were not romantic fellows like Greek heroes. They are boot-makers from Leicester and lace-makers from Nottingham, and potters from Arnold Bennett's "Five Towns," where life is rather drab and its colour is monotone. I met them years ago near Armentières, and afterwards at "Funky Villas," as they call Fonquevillers, near Hébuterne, and the Robin Hoods of the Sherwood Foresters in their steel hats and their muddy khaki would have frightened Friar Tuck if he had met them on a summer's day all under the greenwood tree of that orchard in Hébuterne, where every day the birds of death came howling. The look of them was as little heroic as that of any of our muddy men who trudge along the duckboards leading to hell fire. But the spirit of England's old heroic soul was in them, and on this last Sunday of battle they went headlong into the gates of death, and what they did would be incredible if we did not know its truth.

Between them and the enemy's main defences in the Hindenburg line was the wide water of the Scheldt Canal, and on the other side a long tunnel, where the Germans could be safe from all our shell-fire, and then come up to meet our men with their machine-guns. A frightful place to assault by frontal attack. The boot-makers and the lace-makers, and the potters and the factory hands of the English Midlands practised for their passage of the canal. One of their brigadiers, a V.C.—he has the Elizabethan touch of character—borrowed all the lifebelts of a leave boat, and, putting one on himself, went down to the Somme and led his men in, wading and swimming the river, which is cold these days. And he taught them how to keep their rifles dry and their heads above water. It was with these lifebelts on and with scaling-ladders and hand-bridges and hawsers that the Midland men went forward to the canal in a thick fog last Sunday morning, and made their crossing. Shells burst among them, machine-gun bullets whipped the water and the banks, but, some swimming and some wading, and some hauling themselves across on ropes which they had fixed by throwing lead-lines across, and then by the first men over pulling the ropes to the other side, they gained the German banks at Bellenglise, and, forming up in line, went ahead to Lehaucourt and Magny La Fosse. On both sides of the valley where the Germans had their guns the gunners were firing, and hard fighting ensued before the guns could be captured.

Some of our Tanks were the first to advance upon these gun positions, and came under direct fire at close range before the Midland men closed in. Large numbers of Germans were in hiding in the great tunnel by the canal. A thousand of them were down there and would not come out, hoping to fight again when our waves had passed, and then to blow up mines below our troops. One of our sappers, advancing almost alone, and cutting down two Germans who tried to kill him as he crossed the bridge, broke the leads of the mines and saved the lives of many of his

comrades. One of the captured German howitzers was placed at the mouth of the tunnel and fired down it. It made a noise as though mines had been blown and the bowels of the earth were rent, and before its echoes died away the Germans came rushing out of their tunnel in mad panic and were captured by the Midland men above, who by this day's work—it was all over by ten o'clock that morning—had seized the key of the Hindenburg line above St.-Quentin.

The German withdrawal from the neighbourhood of La Bassée was preceded by a heavy bombardment as final salute from his guns, which have ravaged this mining country for four years, and then his troops stole away on a wide front, leaving only a few machine-gun crew here and there. Our men, among whom were Lancashire, Scottish, and Irish units, followed up as soon as the withdrawal was noticed, and went into empty trenches round about Aubers Ridge, and through old ruins such as those of Wingles, Salome, and Illies, into which our guns have poured shells year after year, and whose towers they have seen, as I have seen them, from trenches about Hulluch and the Hohenzollern Redoubt. There are no towers there now, for the enemy destroyed them before he left by fire and explosives. In the Cité St.-Auguste, the mining village north-east of Lens into which some Gordons went on the first day of the Battle of Loos, in the September of 1915 and never came back again, there were yesterday some rear-guards of machine-gunners, and fighting took place there before our men routed them out. Elsewhere there was scarcely a shot fired, and the enemy went away rapidly to his new line of defence. It may possibly run behind the Haute Deule Canal, at Pont-à-Vendin, to the outskirts of Lille, or, rather, to the edge of those formidable defences round Lille which make that town a strong fortress.

The abandonment of Cité St.-Auguste means that Lens itself has been delivered into our hands, with its neighbouring coalfields, for which English and Canadian troops have

fought such long and fierce battles, and our men are going through its ruins to-day. The report comes to me that one of our cavalry patrols has met a German patrol on the road south-west of Fournes, which is east of Illies, but I am unable to confirm that by certain knowledge. In any case, however, our men are far forward from their old line of yesterday, and from ruined villages like Salome they are staring at the chimneys and roofs of Lille, which seems near, though perhaps a river of blood away if we tried to take it now. Meanwhile, farther south, in the real storm-centre of our present fighting, Cambrai still remains in German hands, within the close girdle of the British line. North of the city the Canadians have not attacked this morning, and are holding their gains against that mass of men which the German High Command have concentrated here in order to safeguard their line between Cambrai and Douai, which would be of deadly consequence if broken through. South of the city our English and Scottish troops are in the suburbs and streets close to the Faubourg St.-Sepulchre and the Faubourg-de-Paris, and drew closer last night by the capture of a redoubt near that last-named avenue, from which there comes a continual patter of machine-gun bullets. The enemy has organized a strong machine-gun defence of Cambrai, under some commander who knows his job, and has posted his gunners on the roofs of Cambrai, with a clear field of fire over the glacis below them where our troops have to move in the open. There do not seem to be many troops, apart from these machine-gunners, in Cambrai. After disgraceful orgies of looting, in which officers joined with their men, the city was put out of bounds to all German troops except the garrison of defence. Several new fires were started yesterday and are burning to-day, their flames being red among the houses, and there are also big fires in neighbouring villages, like Niergnies and Cauroy.

The chief fighting this morning was a good deal south of Cambrai, round Le Catelet, Gouy, and Joncourt, where

English and Australians made an attack shortly after six to-day. Here the enemy had a strong defensive line, which is part of the Beaurevoir-Masnières line, broken farther north, and in front of it there are a number of villages, all strongly fortified for machine-gun defence, and able to bring enfilade fire to bear from one to another. Very terrible positions to attack, and not easy to hold. One village, called Sequehart, has been the scene of fierce fighting for two days or more by our men of the 32nd and 46th Divisions. Twice they have captured its garrison of 200 men, and now once again it has been taken. The troops fighting here have advanced successfully and have taken nearly 2000 prisoners beyond Levergies, and north of them Australians have gone forward south of Le Catelet and Gouy towards the Beaurevoir line, having hard fighting round the village of Wiancourt. On the left of the Australians English troops have captured Gouy and Le Catelet, which by an error had been claimed in some papers as already in our hands. Three thousand prisoners at least have been brought back to-day, and if we break the Beaurevoir line there is not much to hold our men back from Le Cateau, where the "Old Contemptibles" fought on their way down from Mons in the first days of the war. On the right of the line above St.-Quentin the French army was moving to-day at ten o'clock, but I know nothing of their part in the battle.

It is wonderful weather, with sunshine like liquid gold in the fields and a sky of unclouded blue. Even the ruins of the battlefields have a spell of beauty in this light, and I noticed yesterday how their broken walls were dazzling white and all the rubbish heaps of timber and bricks and twisted iron were touched with a kind of glamour.

October 5

This morning, when I went up from Bellenglise to Bellicourt, and along the great tunnel where the Scheldt Canal goes underground for several miles, there was heavy gun-

ning on the left, by Gouy and Le Catelet, and in the direction of Montbrehain and Beaurevoir, where there was fierce fighting yesterday, continuing throughout the night, and resumed to-day. A famous English division added to their record yesterday by capturing 2000 more prisoners at Wiancourt and the outskirts of Montbrehain, where they had heavy fighting. It was probably some of these men whom I saw marching back this morning shortly after dawn, when the mists were white on the fields and dead trees on the sky-line above the canal were faintly pencilled in the grey sky like the masts of ships in a sea fog. Through this greyness and the high thistles that grow between shell-craters and trenches came a long column of Germans guarded by a few men with fixed bayonets. I watched them as they passed, and counted them. There were a thousand of them trudging slowly away from the battle-line in their long grey overcoats and field-caps. Only a few wore the camouflaged shrapnel helmets, and here and there was a man without any kind of headgear. Later in the day I saw another column of about 600, without overcoats this time, having left their line in a greater hurry, and an officer with me said: "It looks like defeat when every day one sees such numbers of prisoners coming back. Truly it looks like the break-up of an army." Yet the enemy is fighting hard now for his Beaurevoir line, knowing that if he loses that he has lost everything that can be called a line until he goes much farther back.

It was no easy fighting for our men yesterday, nor any easier to-day. English and Scots of the 32nd Division, who retook Sequehart, which had already been in our hands twice, were violently counter-attacked, but succeeded in beating off these assaults. It was the 2nd Australian Division who broke the Beaurevoir line west and south-west of that village, working forward with the aid of Tanks, which were handicapped by bad ground and water, to the outskirts of Montbrehain. On the eastern side of the village of Estrées the enemy had a pill-box fortress,

from which there came slashing machine-gun fire; and the Australians were checked there for six hours until by dogged efforts they overpowered the place and captured 200 men in the concrete shelter. While they were outside it they were bombarded by gas shells, which is a horrible method of fighting, and they had to wear their masks, but would not go back because of that. They managed to get east of Wiancourt and west of Beaurevoir, and held their ground during the night, while English troops were thrusting back counter-blows which made them withdraw from Montbrehain, into which they had penetrated during the day. This village was mined, and there were two explosions while our men were in the streets and fighting battalions of no less than nine different divisions. The enemy was on higher ground than our English and Australian troops, and was able to get enfilade fire from one position to another, so that for a time the situation at Montbrehain, where our men were fighting from ten o'clock in the morning until six in the evening, became untenable.

On the left of them, around Le Catelet and Gouy, some of our English battalions who had taken these places by most desperate endeavours were having nagging fighting in the trenches and ruins which form part of the old Hindenburg line beyond the canal, and this morning this was continued without much progress, although somewhat to their right other comrades of theirs were able to make ground towards Ponchaux and Beaurevoir. Against them were a miscellaneous crowd of Germans, including Guards, Grenadier reserve regiment, and the 46th, 88th, 87th, and 96th reserve infantry regiments, while south of them the 34th German Division, with scrapings from depots and offices, cookhouses and camps, were hurried up to counter-attack our men when they were exhausted after long fighting. So for some hours the German resistance has been stiffened, and they are able to keep us in check. It cannot be for long, I imagine, because there is no doubt that the enemy is in desperate straits for reserves strong enough to

make a firm stand, and what I saw to-day is a real proof that there are no lines ahead of us now, which our men cannot break if they have freshness and numbers and are not used up by too long a period of fighting. For the men who captured the further bank of the Scheldt Canal can take anything, and because the Germans could not hold this line they can hold no line. I went along a great length of it to-day, and was astounded that our men could get across with such little cost. It has steep banks 90 feet to 100 feet high on each side of the canal cutting, which is dry by Bellenglise, but with 5 feet to 6 feet or more of water 20 yards wide between that village and Bellicourt, some miles away, when it goes into the tunnel. It was perfectly prepared for defence, with communication trenches leading from the lower ground beyond to the high banks, where there were machine-gun and field-gun emplacements, having a perfect field of fire, should any men be rash enough to advance over the ridge to the western bank. Our men were rash enough, and over the canal are the bridges of planks by which they passed, and in the water the rafts on which they floated.

"The old Boche ought to have defended a position like this to the crack of doom," said one of our officers this morning, and, indeed, it was only the marvellous courage of our men, favoured by dense white fog, which achieved this crossing of the Scheldt Canal. In time of peace it must have been a pleasant place, with steep banks clothed with undergrowth, and the long straight vista of water, which goes suddenly into the hillside. Even now it has none of that grim horror which haunts the Yser Canal, and some Australians there to-day hauling up buckets of water to the crest of the high banks, seemed in a picnic mood, and sang as they worked, though there was bloody fighting just up on the left by Gouy, and German shells were crumping the neighbouring ground, and there was a rattle in the sky more prolonged and more intense than anything I have seen since the fighting in Flanders last year.

German airmen were audacious, and some of their best fighting scouts were out above the Scheldt Canal, watching our activities and searching for any new menace preparing against them. Our air patrol challenged them to single fights and tourneys, or "dog-fights," as our flying men call them without romance, and there was the constant chatter of machine-guns overhead and the droning of many engines, as our squadrons came sailing up and more hostile aircraft appeared from the clouds. From behind the British lines many thousands of men stared up at this sky battle, and there was furious work by our anti-aircraft guns. One after another in less than two minutes two aeroplanes came crashing to earth, poor broken things. Out of one a body fell, swaying so lightly that I think it must have been fastened to a parachute, but the other fell like a rocket. So in the sunlight which had now broken through the mist there was swift tragedy like a stab at the heart, but that way of death was better than another way which I saw when I went into a tunnel where the water goes under the hill. This tunnel is five miles long, but I walked only a little way through. It was pitch-dark, without the tiniest glimmer of light, so that its blackness was like velvet on one's eyes. By a pocket torch I could see ahead, and I flashed it over the black water of the canal, where there were many big old wooden barges. Here many Germans had hidden until they were routed out, and after that, when a party of Australians advanced with torches and hand grenades and fixed bayonets, they saw ahead of them a glint of light, and shouted, "Who goes there?" and waited. Presently very slowly towards them came, not Germans, but two old bush-rangers with a stump of candle between them. "Well, boys," they said, "Don't be scared. We're only exploring a bit on our own." They had got into the tunnel higher up and were on the prowl for Germans or souvenirs.

There are only dead Germans in the tunnel now, and dead in such a way that the sight of them revived that gruesome story of the German "Kadaveranstalt," or corpse

factory, which some time ago deceived the credulous. A wild rumour spread among English and Australian troops that here they had discovered the ghoulish work of boiling down German bodies for their grease, and because it is likely to spread the tradition I must tell the truth of it. In a cavern off the main tunnel were two boilers, and round about them lay, as I saw, the bodies of German soldiers, and inside the boilers were bits of bodies. What more was wanted as evidence of a foul practice? To men of easy belief in the worst horrors of humanity such evidence would be good enough, but I prefer the mentality of an Australian boy, whose face I could not see, but who as he stumbled along by my side said: "I want to get at the truth of this tale, because I do not think that any men in the world would be vile enough to do such things." And the truth is that by some explosion from within or without these German cooks and soldiers had been killed and blown to bits as they stood round their stewpans, and that parts of their bodies had fallen into the boiling grease. I saw a gun-carriage in the tunnel close to this cookhouse, suggesting that there had been a premature burst of shell in the side of the tunnel, and in the roof of the cookhouse itself was a small hole, through which a fragment of shell had come. But whatever happened to kill the men, it is obvious that they had all met a sudden death where they lay, and that only disordered imagination or belief by hearsay would credit the fantastic horror of a "Kadaveranstalt." The truth was horrible enough, and I went away quickly into the fresh air beyond that black tunnel, with one more memory of what war means.

It was at Bellicourt, by the entrance of the tunnel, that the Americans made their attack last Sunday, and continued fighting with the Australians as their comrades for some days later. I have said something already about their audacity in attack and the great enthusiasm of their assault upon the German lines, and there is nothing more that I can say about it except to pay a tribute to the magnificent

valour of those young American soldiers who came into their first big battle full of courage and impetuous desire —these boys of New York State and Tennessee and North and South Carolina—and, leading the advance, broke the strongest defences of the Hindenburg line up by Bellicourt, and stormed their way across the canal to the machine-guns on the other bank, and went forward that day like huntsmen in a chase. That must never be forgotten. In one of the greatest battles of the war—when we crossed the Scheldt Canal and broke the last barrier of the enemy's defensive positions—it was these Americans who stormed one of the most formidable sectors of the line and overpowered the enemy. I have recently been among some of the young soldiers, and saw them encamped in our newly won ground, and passed their transport on the roads through the battle-fields. They looked hard and fit, and were whistling rag-time tunes as they sat outside their "bivvies" writing letters.

I have no time to-day to tell some of the news that comes to me from Flanders, where our Scotties went into Ledeghem and drank coffee given to them by rescued civilians, and heard their tales of suffering in German hands. At the beginning of war they had a bad time, and twenty-eight of their people were killed on some pretext or other by the enemy, and their food, supplied by the American Relief Committee, was stolen from them, and their wool was taken and their boots were robbed. Later the arrogance of the German soldiers changed and even in April last, when their army was advancing against us, and things were bad for us, these soldiers said: "It is only an English trick to kill us," and they had no belief in victory, and have now a belief in absolute defeat. The Belgian armoured cars have done gallant work up there, and one drove into Roulers and escaped only by a hairbreadth, having two of its crew killed and two wounded, and only one man left to drive it.

October 9

Another deadly blow was struck by us this morning against the German army south-east of Cambrai. Several thousands of prisoners were already captured early this morning when I was up in the battle area beyond Bellicourt, and more are coming down, and as we are now working round the German gun positions and getting out beyond all the trench-lines it seems certain that we shall capture some of their artillery. There were many wonderful features about this battle, making it different from other attacks. One was the hour at which some of our divisions began their advance, and another was the extremely complicated disposition and movement of our assault troops, owing to the lie of the ground and the necessity of clearing those parts of the Beaurevoir line which had not yet been taken, so that, while some of our troops were fighting eastwards towards various villages scattered in front of them, others were working southwards and northwards behind the Beaurevoir line itself. All that made the operation very difficult for men new to this ground, and the difficulties were increased by the darkness which closed them in when they started. Some of them, including Welsh troops, began their assault at one o'clock in the night, others, like the New Zealanders and English county troops, at 4.30; and others, again, including the American troops, attacked at half-past five. But they all began to move in darkness, which was without any glimmer of moonlight, and with no visibility five yards ahead, and it is an astounding thing that large numbers of men in these conditions should have been able to keep their direction.

The village of Villers-Outreaux, which was attacked an hour after midnight by Welsh troops, with English following them in, was thrust out as a kind of outpost fortress in the way of our general plan of advance. It was held by a strong garrison, with many machine-guns hidden in the houses, and in daylight it would have been a formidable undertaking to assault it frontally; hence the scheme of at-

tack in the dark. The enemy was utterly surprised. I know that from prisoners from this village. One of them, a rather fine-looking man, with a short blonde beard, described what had happened.

"We were startled," he said, "by heavy fire from the British guns, and some of us expected an attack and were afraid of being killed. But our officers told us not to be alarmed, because it was only a demonstration by the enemy guns, and would not last more than two hours, during which we should be perfectly safe if we went down in our dug-outs. We had good dug-outs under Villers-Outreaux, and we all went down, huddled inside them, and listening to the bursting shells above, and some of us talking of the peace which had been asked for by the Kaiser. None of us wanted to die if the war was going to end soon. So two hours passed, and, as our officers had said, the drumfire ceased. But just as we were beginning to feel safe for another few hours at least we heard the shouts of English soldiers, and knew then that we were lost, because they were all round our dug-outs. We could do nothing, and our machine-guns were useless, and we had to surrender."

I saw some strange scenes across that Canal-du-Nord which was crossed a week ago by such great heroism of English and Australian and American soldiers. Along the roads leading down from the villages we attacked to-day there came the first columns of German prisoners and the first groups of wounded—ours and the enemy's. American soldiers were the escorts of many hundreds of Germans, who marched along quietly with their captors. In one field beyond the canal I saw nearly a thousand of them assembled as they had just come down out of the battle, and from up the road there were other parties, with American mounted men riding on each side of them.

The Americans had formed up in the night along the line between Ponchaux and Montbrehain, east of the great Canal, and before them lay the villages of Brancourt and Prémont and Faicourt Hill and Woods. The enemy was

there in strength, holding each village and each copse with many machine-guns and with bits of trench and earthworks as strong points. It was ugly ground to attack, but the Americans were in good heart and very confident, and started well at about ten minutes past five in black darkness. They overcame the first German resistance pretty easily on account of the surprise to the enemy and his inability to see for his machine-gun fire, but farther on they lost their advantage of surprise, and German machine-gunners in Brancourt tried hard to check them by sweeping fire. The Americans had a hard task to get beyond the sunken road, where many of these machine-guns were hidden, but by fine gallantry stormed the position and swept beyond towards Faicourt Woods, which they worked round. They also advanced on their left, and penetrated the village of Prémont after some stern fighting. From both these villages they gathered in many hundreds of prisoners, more there than 1500, and in the German support trench between these points they found four French civilians, elderly men who for some reason I do not yet know had been brought into this line. I spoke with many American officers, who were well satisfied with the progress their men had made, and one of them said to me, "It's a great day for England and America."

Some of the German officers they captured were of high rank, and they seemed dazed and disconcerted to find themselves in American hands, but were very polite, and answered all questions in good English. One of these made a frank avowal. "Our position is desperate," he said, "we have no strong lines and no reserves behind us, and we are finished. There is nothing more that we can do."

To-day's battle was on a wide front, and our English, Scottish, Welsh, and New Zealand troops bore the brunt of the fighting, as far as numbers go. On the extreme left of the attack we penetrated to the village of Niergnies, just south of Cambrai, and our English battalions advanced upon it in the darkness, and in the first half-hour took 150

prisoners in the outskirts. The only light they had was from ruddy fires, giving a wild glare in the night sky. Shortly after their assault was launched they were counter-attacked strongly, and had to fall back a little from the village, but with help of Tanks they made their way back, captured 400 prisoners, and destroyed a German Tank which, with two others, had supported the counter-attack of the enemy. This is one of the rare times in which the Germans have used their Tanks in action—I think the only other time was against the Australians at Villers-Bretonneaux, near Amiens—and yesterday I saw what clumsy and slow-going engines these are compared with out latest pattern, and especially with our fast "whippets." The German counter-attacks overlapped on to troops south of Niergnies, where our men were advancing towards Serainvillers and La Targette, and for a time those on our left were driven back but on the right made good progress, while Tanks passed through them and ahead of them towards Wambaix.

South of these positions again English battalions and New Zealanders were advancing towards Esnes as a far objective, and the New Zealanders went away almost too fast, so that they were in danger of getting out of touch with the troops on their flanks. A valley lay between them and Esnes, where in rainy weather a torrent runs. But by good luck it was almost dry to-day. Here the Germans had built many concrete dug-outs, and their troops had taken refuge in them, and had to be routed out by New Zealanders. Along the line towards Esnes there was hard and desperate fighting by the enemy, and many were killed. Our heavy Tanks cruised along this line, attacking strong points and machine-gun nests and rounding up groups of prisoners, while the lighter "whippets" went ahead like destroyers in a naval battle and broke down belts of wire and spread terror among the German soldiers, who only knew our men were near when they saw these queer entities like hansom-cabs in Prehistoric Peeps. Some

stern and bloody work was done round two places called Angelus Orchard and Maison Farm, and round about this country several of our Tanks were in action, and cleared up the positions. Elsewhere there was sharp fighting by some brick-stacks organized for machine-gun defence, and this was dealt with from the air by a squadron of bombers and machine-gunners.

All through our battle our airmen were flying low, so low, as I saw them this morning over the great canal, that they seemed like swallows skimming the heads of the thistles. There were heavy rain-clouds, and, indeed, at about nine in the morning heavy rain, so that it was only by flying low that our airmen could get any observation, and they risked machine-gun bullets and rifle-fire at short range to bring back news, which they did with astonishing speed and accuracy.

Among the infantry who share the great honour of this day were those on the Beaurevoir line, who advanced towards the Walincourt-Audigny line. They met with fierce resistance at German strong points, but with stubborn courage beat this down, and worked round Folie Farm and Serain and Villers Farm. They also had the aid of the Tank Corps, which rendered gallant service. The full results of this day cannot be written at this hour, but it is a day of good success when hereabouts we have broken through the enemy's last continuous organized lines at a time when, without strong reserves in this part of the country, he is in grave peril. Whatever happens, this is certain—the German army has been dealt a vital blow when already it is weak from loss of blood and failing spirit.

IV

The Capture of the City

October 10

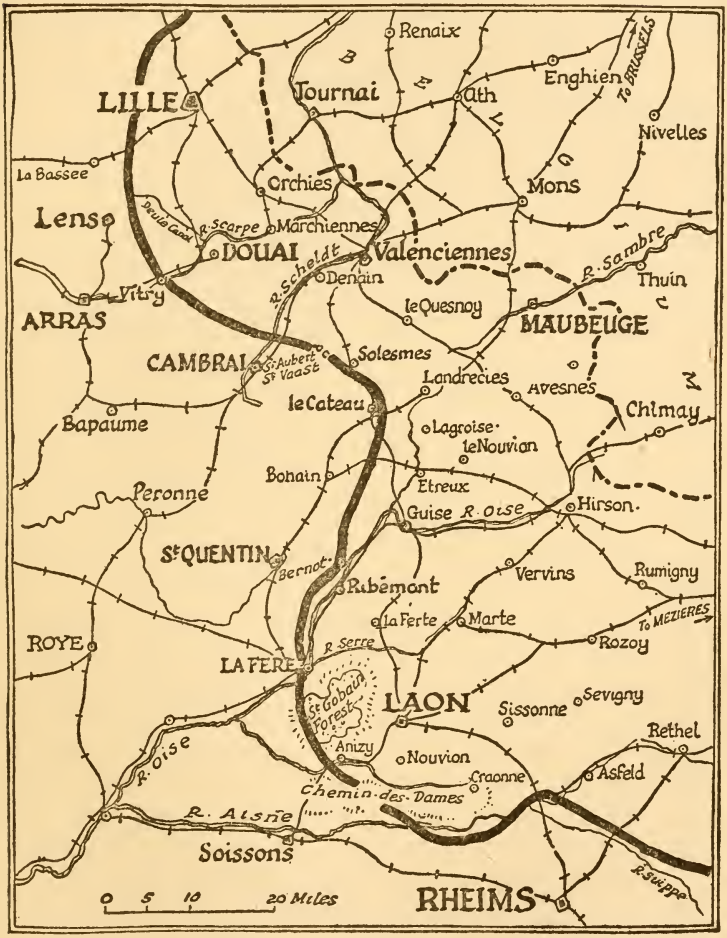
At four o'clock this morning, in darkness except for the light of the stars, Canadians and English troops, pressing

close from north and south, joined hands in the chief square of Cambrai. This morning the enemy is in retreat behind thin rear-guards, and the whole city of Cambrai is safely in our hands. For a long distance south of Cambrai the German army is hard in flight, blowing up bridges and burning villages, and our troops are away eastward trying to keep touch with the enemy rear-guards.

This morning I went into Cambrai. As on that day, now nearly two years ago, when I first went into Bapaume, on a morning of history, this entry into our newly captured town was the end of a long phase of war which had reached a victorious climax, and the journey I made up the long straight road past Fontaine-Notre-Dame was full of interest, and gave me a sense of drama beyond the ordinary scenes of war. Because to get to Cambrai our Army has fought a long and a hard fight since those days in November last, when our men first came in sight of the city, and then had to fall back again, and since last March, when, under the weight of the German onslaught, they had to retreat almost as far back as Amiens, and Cambrai seemed then a world away. But in two months to this very day they have not only fought their way back to their old front lines, but are now far into country which was never ours before, and Cambrai itself is their prize; while the enemy, broken for ever in his strength, is in hard retreat beyond.

Truly to-day is a glorious day for British arms, and the honour of it goes to the private soldier and the young officer of English, Irish, and Scottish, Welsh, Canadian, Australian, New Zealand, and American forces, who, with untiring courage, have fought every yard of this way, have stormed the strongest lines ever made in war, and beaten down every deadly obstacle with which the enemy has tried to bar their way. I went towards the city too early to know whether it was taken, and even after I had been into its streets and out again I met machine-gunners on the outskirts who did not know, and were amazed when I told them that I had come out of the place, and that it was full of our

troops. The long, straight road from Bapaume through Fontaine-Notre-Dame, whose ruins still reek of human



THE LINE BEFORE THE GERMANS' LAST RETREAT

strife, and past Bourlon Wood, where the tattered trees are hung with yellowing foliage, was deserted, except for a few soldiers trudging forward, and here and there a lorry driv-

ing daringly near to the noise of the guns. Our guns were firing from the woods and hidden places, and their shells went howling overhead, but as I drew nearer to the city I saw a number of our field-batteries on the western edge of it, and they were opening rapid fire. I walked on with a friend of mine, and we stood above some German dug-outs, where some of our men crouched over their breakfast, and from a knoll we looked closer at Cambrai than I had even been in this battle. Because where we stood no man could have stood and lived a day ago. Behind us, on our right, was La Folie Wood, and just a little way ahead were the suburbs of St.-Olle and the Scheldt Canal, which is the western boundary of the city. Before us were the houses and spires of Cambrai under a clear sky, with the sunlight gleaming on the roofs. Clouds of smoke, rose-coloured and tawny, welled up from the centre of the city and from its eastern streets, and a light breeze caught it as it gushed out of the gulfs of ruin and folded it like a long pall above the tallest spires. "They have burnt the place," was the bitter thought that came to us, and a Canadian officer described how, all through the night, he had watched red flames licking up from the buildings there.

At ten o'clock, some machine-gunners told me the German artillery had begun a bombardment of the outskirts, and there was wild work of lights and flares above the city. But a little later, when we heard from a dispatch-rider that our troops were inside, and when we walked into its streets, we found that the fires were only here and there, and we were rejoiced to see that there are many streets and large numbers of houses and public buildings hardly touched by the traces of war. Along the straight road going to the entrance of the city on the western side dead horses lay, killed a few hours before by shell-fire, and in one place there was a pile of dead horses, which some of our men had covered with brushwood to hide their blood and mangled bodies. Farther along by some ruined cottages on the wayside two dead Germans lay, their field-grey uniforms stained

red in patches. They seemed like the last two guards of the city gates.

There was no living German to bar our way in. Making our way across the Scheldt Canal, we got into the outer streets of the city. Canadian soldiers were already working as though they had been there for days, instead of an hour or two, and some of them were collecting fish for breakfast. That was an extraordinary thing. Explosive charges fired by the Germans to blow up the bridge had killed many fish, and hundreds of them lay dead on the surface of the canal, washed up by the locks as the breeze made a current in the water. There was something uncanny and sensational in walking into Cambrai for the first time, and so soon after the enemy's flight. Except for English and Canadian soldiers who were passing through it to pursue the enemy beyond, there was no sign of life anywhere, and I went up the deserted streets and into many abandoned houses, and into lonely gardens. Overhead there was the noise of aerial battle. German planes came over to watch the traffic on our roads, and were challenged by our flying men with a rattle of machine-gun fire, and our Archies got busy, and there was the whang and whine of shrapnel in the sky. In the heart of the city big fires were smouldering up by the Place-du-Theâtre, and beyond the Place d'Armes now and then there were rumblings as though explosions were taking place, and the clatter of falling masonry. These sounds gave us a sense of alertness to danger, and we walked as men who know that there is no safety on their way. For we knew that Cambrai might be mined, and we had had warnings of booby traps so laid that if one trips on a wire or touches any innocent-looking object in a deserted house, or treads on a loose board in some doorway, sudden things may happen which would end all further interest in war or life.

In a street on the western side of the town a British aeroplane stood tail up and nose down. Both its wings had gone, and there were shrapnel holes in the chassis. But its

wheels were unbroken, and I hoped with all my heart that the boy who had flown this thing had been given the luck of a safe landing. I went round by the big white barracks named by the Germans "Von Marwitz Kaserne," after the general commanding their army, and the man who counter-attacked us in the Cambrai salient last November, so marring one of our best victories. Everywhere there were German signs revealing the enemy's life in this town, and one notice painted on many walls was "Zur Flinkekiste" (to the cinema), showing that the German soldiers have their moving pictures like our men in rest billets. But in one doorway there was posted up a notice in French, and its words dug into one's mind the human tragedy which had happened here a few weeks ago, the tragedy of the city's abandonment by the people who had their homes and their business and their interest in life, and suddenly, at the command of the enemy in whose grip they were, had to leave everything and go away deeper into bondage. It was a proclamation by the German Kommandant of Cambrai, Gloss by name, stating that "In the interest of security, the inhabitants of Cambrai will be evacuated to a region further removed from the war-zone." They were ordered to leave on September 7 and 8, and each day a train carrying 1500 people would leave the station. Every inhabitant must have his identity and work card, and would be allowed only such baggage as could be carried on a long march. So these people could only take a few small belongings with them, and they had to leave behind all their furniture and property of any bulk to become the booty of the German looter.

The Germans had ravaged all the houses and shops for "souvenirs," as I wrote yesterday, but there is still furniture in many houses, and many places have been left just as they were abandoned by weeping women of France with their children and old men, except for the rummaging of Teuton hands. It was pitiful. There are many fine houses in Cambrai owned by wealthy people who had good taste,

and on the walls there still hang gold-frame mirrors and pictures, and there are torn tapestry hanging up at windows and heaps of books and papers scattered about the upturned furniture which was once very handsome in the style of Louis Quatorze. These houses and *salons* into which I looked reminded me of the scenes in the French Revolution, which must have happened like this in Cambrai. But what touched one most was the wreckage of the smaller houses and little shops and restaurants. I looked into houses where women's sewing-machines still stood on the tables as they had done their work with their babes around them. Perambulators stood on the thresholds or in the passageway, and children's dolls lay on the floors as they had been dropped because of the terror that had followed the notice on the walls, signed by Kommandant Gloss. China and glass were in the cupboards or on the kitchen tables unbroken amidst the litter of clothes turned over by German soldiers searching for things to take away. I went into one little parlour and found all the crockery neatly arranged by some careful housewife and an array of wine-glasses on the sideboard.

At every step one saw evidence of the peaceful civilian life in Cambrai through all these years of war, until that day in September last when it was destroyed by proclamation. One queer thing stood in the middle of one street. It was a dressmaker's mannikin, wearing a straw hat, and with a pearl necklace round its wooden shoulders. And in another street nearby there was something more queer. At first I thought it was a mask of the Kaiser's face fastened to a rainspout. But, going nearer, I saw it was a human skull staring up with sightless eyes. A church stood unbroken by shell-fire except for damage to its windows, and I went inside and saw that it was all arranged for service, with candles on the altar. The statues of the saints were untouched, and everything seemed new and bright and gilded. The cathedral of Cambrai is scarred, but not yet badly hurt. A Renaissance building like that of Arras and

the tower of the Town Hall, beautiful in its Gothic work, points upwards to the sky as through many centuries of history. But this tower is on the edge of the smouldering fires, and if they spread it will not escape.

One interesting place was the shop of the Spanish-Dutch Relief Committee, once the American Relief Committee, for providing food to the French inhabitants in the occupied zone. It was in full working order, with all its shelves neatly arranged, and wooden counters labelled for the distribution of sugar, milk, beans, cocoa, and so on, and I found bundles of ration cards neatly done up and ready for issue. One's imagination realized the crowd which must have come here for food as to a fairy godmother in that beseiged town, with all the women lined up behind these counters. I have no more time to describe the romance of this deserted city, the first large city still upstanding which we have captured since the war began. There was no fighting in it this morning. English and Canadian troops entered when the enemy was in flight, and found only thirteen German soldiers, who had stayed behind in hiding. I saw three of them brought into the office of the Canadian brigade to be searched for papers and arms, and they were very scared.

The last big fight for Cambrai took place yesterday at the suburb of Niergnies, on the south, where our Naval Division, the 63rd, stormed their way through with splendid courage. It was the southern gateway to Cambrai, and the enemy defended it in strength. But the Ansons, Hoods, and other naval men smashed through their trenches, and took many prisoners, and then drove right through the village to the eastern side. Here, at eight o'clock in the morning, they were counter-attacked fiercely, and the enemy brought into action seven British Tanks which they had captured in the earlier fighting. They were fired at by German anti-Tank guns found by our men, and two of our battalion commanders, one of whom is a gunner, directed this fire. One of these officers made use of a German

field-gun, and knocked out two of the Tanks with German shells, and would have done more damage but for using up all the German ammunition. But five out of seven Tanks were destroyed, and the other two departed in a hurry. A topsy-turvey kind of affair. At first a counter-attack drove back the Naval Division men to the eastern outskirts of the village, but they counter-attacked the counter-attack with the help of a barrage, and captured many more Germans.

Elsewhere yesterday's battle between Cambrai and our position north of St.-Quentin gave us more than 8000 prisoners. The New Zealanders had very hard fighting for the village of Lesdain, which remained in their hands, and took many prisoners. The American division alone took more than 1500 prisoners in the capture of Brancourt and Prémont, which I described yesterday. Heroic fighting was done by the English and Scottish battalions of the 25th and 66th Divisions in the storming of Serain. They have their reward to-day for their daring yesterday, for that most audacious battle in all this war perhaps, when masses of men attacked in pitch-darkness, and before daylight, broke the enemy's strong positions by smashing through his Beaurevoir line where he still held a long strip of trenches and earthworks.

The reward of all our men and of Americans who are our comrades is that to-day the enemy is retreating so fast and so far that we can hardly keep pace with him. It is difficult to find even his whereabouts opposite some of our corps fronts, and to show his speed it is interesting to know that he is 10,000 yards farther east than the line he was holding at Esnes yesterday. That was early this morning, and he may be even farther now. German prisoners tell us that it is the Germans intention to destroy everything in the wake of their retreat, as they did in March, 1917. But we have hurried them too hard to allow the incendiaries to get to work in some of the villages now liberated, though at some places beyond fires are visible.

The enemy has also had to leave behind him several thousand civilians—500 in Serain and 5000 in Bohain. A friend of mine saw some of these poor people to-day. Being in Cambrai, I did not meet them. They greeted the arrival of the British soldiers with tears and cheers, and showed wild joy at their liberation. There were scenes like those I saw at Tincourt during the first German retreat—processions among our guns and transport and old people in wheelbarrows and sturdy grandmothers carrying big bundles, with grandchildren clinging to their skirts. At Serain they were given their choice to stay or leave eight days ago, and most of them stayed in big cellars beneath a lace factory, in which they stored food. The German commandment prepared a large white flag with a red cross, and hoisted it over the village as a sign to our gunners not to shoot, and they did not shoot, but an hour after our entry the Germans began to bombard the place, and the poor civilians had to escape under the shell-fire. That was at ten o'clock yesterday morning.

So begins another chapter of the history of this war, for with the capture of Cambrai and the new German retreat we end these amazing two months of fighting for the city, all the way from Amiens, and have inflicted a definite defeat upon the enemy, and killed all his hopes as a military Power.

PART VIII

THE LAST PHASE

I

Our Armies of Pursuit

October 10

The enemy is still retreating, and our men are fighting round Le Cateau, famous for the battle by the "Old Contemptibles" in August 1914.

Among the troops attacking Le Cateau are Manchesters and Lancashire Fusiliers, and also Inniskilling and Dublin Fusiliers and Connaught Rangers of the 66th Division alongside the 25th Division. The enemy is holding a line down from Solesmes, and is said to be in some strength. But our troops advancing yesterday from ground beyond Serain which they had captured by hard fighting, and where the Connaughts had to resist severe counter-attacks, are now astride the old Roman road leading to the town, and are in the northern suburbs.

South of Le Cateau the 20th Division are near the village of St.-Benin, with many German machine-gunners holding positions in front of them. The Germans were cleared from Elaincourt the night before last, and some of our troops pushed forward all day yesterday and gained Bertry and Maurois.

Meanwhile, around Cambrai our 11th Division has cleared a wide tract of ground beyond Paillencourt, and the Canadians have gone across the Erclin river and are holding Avesnes-le-Sec and Naves, north-east of Cambrai.

The Canadians deserve special honour for hurrying the enemy out of Cambrai itself before he was ready to go by an attack delivered at 1.30 that night, when they took between 300 and 400 prisoners and smashed the German rear-guard. But our 57th Division had fought also with great gallantry on the outskirts of Cambrai and had joined hands with them in the city on the morning of its capture.

Our pursuit is everywhere in touch with the enemy, and is pressing his retirement. But almost as important now as these military operations is the effect of the peace proposals on the psychology of the German soldiers. From all I have heard to-day from people who have been listening to German conversations for four years I am convinced that any delay in obtaining peace will create despair among many German soldiers. These men are panting for peace, and have no will for further fighting unless they have to fight as beasts at bay will fight. They want to go back to their homes in Germany. That is their constant plaint, and they are ready for peace on any terms which will end their misery in the fields of war.

To-day I have been with our pursuing troops far beyond the Scheldt Canal and the Beaurevoir line, through many villages into which our men have gone without a fight. Yesterday morning, after I had left Cambrai on a lorry driven by a soldier in a most respectable top-hat—he was as grave as a judge on the way to quarter sessions and hid the twinkle in his eye until I chaffed him for his choice of souvenirs—it was reported that there were many explosions inside the city, and that fires were spreading. This alarming statement was an exaggeration, and, although some explosions were caused by smouldering fires near the Place du Theatre, the conflagration has not spread, and the city remains to-day as I saw it yesterday, with many streets and houses undestroyed, and with beautiful gardens enclosed in walls so neat and trim that when I stepped inside and saw their flower-beds and their fruit-trees it seemed to

me like enchantment beyond the ruin through which we have waded in four years of fighting.

And to-day I had a similar feeling when I went beyond the battle-zone and came for the first time into undestroyed villages where there were real roofs on upstanding houses and walls with neat red bricks unpierced by monstrous shell-holes and shops and schools and market-places just as in French villages behind our lines and beyond gun-range. Yet these places were in front of where our fighting-lines have been, and until a night and morning ago behind the German lines, and our way to them lies through a forty-mile belt of desolation, where no village is standing nor any house, nor any wall, nor any shed, but all is flung into an obscene chaos of ruin. I drove through those forty miles this morning—the whole depth of our advance since August 8, and every mile of it was haunted by memories of bloody fighting, and every landmark of broken brickwork or dead trees or twisted iron was a place where men of ours have done heroic and deadly things.

It was when going through Aubencheul and Villers-Outreaux, beyond the great canal which our men crossed, a famous Sunday ago, and through the Beaurevoir line, with its belts of rusty wire which they stormed in their last big battle, that I saw fresh tracks of strife and the relics that always tell one that only a day or two have passed since war was here. Along that road, in ditches on either side, lay dead horses and overturned gun-limbers and smashed guns. I have never seen a road so strewn with dead beasts, not even the Menin road in Flanders. Every yard along the way shell-holes had punctured the banks on either side, and artillery teams, driving at the gallop towards Villers-Outreaux, had been slashed by fire. It was the way of the German retreat and a way of horror.

Villers-Outreaux was the place which the Welshmen attacked in pitch darkness two nights ago, when they closed in upon the German garrison and fought their machine-gunners and then stormed the village from end to end,

taking many prisoners. Our side of it was damaged in the usual way by shelling, and walls were smashed to rubbish-heaps, but the centre of the village, which is a large place, was hardly touched, and the buildings round its old market-place were unscarred by battle.

Beyond that village there was clean country, with fields ploughed after harvest, and smooth roads and little towns like Malincourt and Walincourt and Selvigny, which were quite unscathed by war and beautiful to see by eyes tired to death of ruin. They had whitewashed walls and red-tiled roofs, and the *mairie* stand solid and square near the market-places, and the Ecole Communale, the public school of the hamlet, has unbroken walls and windows.

Truly it was wonderful to see such places beyond that forty miles of misery, but more astonishing was it to find the inhabitants of the villages still in their houses and shops, still smiling after four years of agony in the enemy's hands. They stood in little groups staring with joyful eyes at the passing of British soldiers and British transport soldiers, of the Welsh Dragon, who still has its tail up, though it has travelled far since crossing the Ancre in August last. The women surrounded any soldier who could speak a little French, and poured out their gratitude for this deliverance. One man stood on the step of my car, taking off his hat, and bowing and shaking hands with an excited courtesy. "Ah, monsieur," he said, "you cannot understand what it means to us after four years of suffering. Your soldiers have fed us, and we needed food, but best of all is the gift of liberty."

At Selvigny, where there are more than 500 civilians, I chatted with many of the women and children and with elderly men who had not been taken away like all male civilians between sixteen and sixty, whom the Germans had driven before them on their retreat. These people told me many tragic things—the tragedy of small, nagging things, which every day, in hostile hands, had fretted their spirit and their pride. The Germans had robbed them of every-

thing in their farms and houses. They had stolen their linen and their window curtains, they had killed their fowls, and they had made them pay fines—1700 francs at Selvigny —for not producing enough eggs. They requisitioned their butter and their milk and their vegetables, and they would have starved, or nearly starved, if it had not been for the International Relief Committee.

Stores came every fifteen days, but even then the Germans laid hands on some of the supplies, such as lard and any kind of fat. "Were you really hungry?" I asked a woman who was packing some things into a perambulator before leaving for a safer place, and she said in French (which is better than English for this phrase): "There was too much for death, but not enough for life." She passed her hand over her face, smiling a little at her own words, and said: "You will not find us looking fat." And truly she and the other women had a pinched look with sharp cheek-bones and pale skin tightly drawn.

Their memories went back to old things of horror in the first days of their captivity four years ago. At Crevecœur, when English soldiers retreated there, they fastened a steel chain across the road to check the pursuit of the German cavalry, and when the enemy arrived they accused civilians of having done this, and eighteen of them were shot. The *curé* of Malincourt, so one man told me, though I cannot believe him without futher evidence, was shot for giving hot soup to a wounded Englishman.

A number of English soldiers were cut off during the retreat, and stayed with these French people, working as their servants, but when this was discovered by the Germans they made the men kneel in a ditch, and a firing party was brought up, and they were killed. Even the people who harboured them were punished and sent into Germany to forced labour. Those are old stories in the first days of terror.

Since then these people say the Germans behaved well enough and did not commit any atrocities, and some of

them were kind and polite, though many were hard and arrogant. So it went on until the last few days, when before the British advance the garrison of Selvigny and these other villages did brutal things by order or without order. They told inhabitants that the English were coming and that they must fly, but when the civilians refused to go, crying out "No, no, we will stay, nothing will make us go," they were ordered down into their cellars in case they were bombarded. And when they were there the German soldiers pillaged upstairs and smashed their furniture and their ornaments, and rummaged about their private things searching for souvenirs and booty that could be carried easily.

The *curé* of Selvigny, with whom I had a long talk this morning, told me other things more tragic. I found him in his kitchen surrounded with women who were helping him to arrange the evacuation of their children and old people, and as he told me his story they listened and broke in now and then to add some detail which he had forgotten, to raise their hands and say, "Yes, the brutes did that to us."

I had already heard of one thing that happened two days ago in Selvigny, but I was glad to hear it at first hand from this old priest, who, by great courage and cunning, had saved his church from destruction, the red-brick church which I saw through his window as we were talking.

"I knew they meant to destroy it," he said, "because I saw German soldiers put bombs at each corner of the tower and carry up cases of explosives into the loft. Then I saw them fix wires across the little cemetery, and I knew that unless the English came quickly my dear church would be blown up. But the night before they came I crept out and searched for the wires, and by good luck found them without being seen. I cut them, and then came back feeling very joyful and yet a little afraid lest my trick should be discovered."

He told me of the suffering of his people, but said this was due largely to the condition of war, and no protest could be made for what was the inevitable misery of war.

What angered him, what seemed to him useless and incredible cruelty, was that by the German High Command all the machines by which these people earned their livelihood in time of peace were destroyed. At Selvigny, Walincourt, and other villages all around the people make embroidery and tulle, and for this work have delicate and expensive machines, those at Selvigny costing 50,000 francs. French inhabitants from the district of the Somme were ordered to break the machines which their poor owners would not do, even though they died for their refusal, and this destruction was carried out before their eyes as part of the general scheme to destroy French industries.

The *curé* took away some of the delicate parts of machinery and hid them, but this was discovered, and he was fined 100 marks, and the machinery was broken up and scattered outside his doors. Some time afterwards a Bavarian priest came to the village and was lodged by the *curé,* and because he could speak no French the old *curé* wrote down in Latin the thing that had been done to kill the handicraft of his people. The Bavarian priest read the words and made no kind of answer, but was very much confused.

All these villagers told me to-day that the German soldiers are enraged with their Government for having caused them so much misery, and are especially savage with those they call the capitalists, whose blood they promise to shed. "As sure as the rising of the sun," said one French villager, "there will be revolution in Germany after the war."

And all these people agree in saying that the German soldiers are suffering grievously from lack of food, especially during the last two months, and that they are glad even to go into the front line in spite of all their fears because there they are better fed than when in rest. Prisoners taken in recent fighting by our 66th Division near Cambrai were surprised that they should have been attacked on what they believed was the eve of peace. One of their officers said: "Peace will be signed at six o'clock to-night," and

they all thought that the German proposal would be accepted instantly by the Allies.

October 12

The enemy is attempting to delay our pursuit by rear-guard screens, in order, I believe, to gain time for an orderly and wide retreat, and his resistance is stiffening north-east of Cambrai. At some points his retreat has been disorderly eastwards from Cambrai.

When he was hustled out of that city two mornings ago, and when our cavalry patrols came astride the Le Cateau-Cambrai road, with the 6th Division pressing close to Le Cateau itself, the German plan of retirement, which became inevitable as soon as our heroic men stormed their way across the Scheldt Canal and left the Hindenburg line far behind them, as an ironical comment on "invincible defences," was violently disturbed.

The German High Command had, in my opinion, drawn up a secret scheme of retreat which included ruthless destruction in their wake. All churches, like that at Selvigny, where yesterday I saw the bombs and explosive charges made useless by the courage of the old priest who cut the wires, were to be blown up. All bridges were to be mined, and craters were to be made in the roads—at Selvigny four Germans left to do this work were blown to bits in the explosion—in order to stop Tanks and armoured cars, and everything of use to Germany in her last ditches of defence was to be packed up and taken away.

At Caudry, which fell into our hands yesterday with 2500 civilians, there was a German detraining point, and British prisoners of war are said to have been employed in transferring large stores of food, ammunition, hospital tents, and other material, including French pumps and pump handles, and any metal work left among the villages.

There seem to have been elaborate preparations to destroy the whole area around Caudry, Lesdains, Esnes, and all the towns and hamlets north and south and east of Cam-

brai. Our men were too quick for them, and that country as far east as Le Cateau is undestroyed, in our hands, and many poor people have been liberated from the enemy, including 4000 at Bohain. So by our rapid pursuit the German retreat was for a time thrown into some confusion, and our airmen flying low over their *ruckmarschstrasse*—roads of retreat—got back sometimes with descriptions of wild stampedes.

Along these roads eastwards through Bazuel, Mazinchien, Catillon, Wassigny, and scores of other villages, there were surging tides of traffic, guns, wagons, farm carts, and all kinds of transport struggling slowly along, through retreating troops and streams of French civilians driven away from their homes. Sometimes this traffic gets blocked at cross-roads, wagons lose their wheels and are abandoned in ditches, carts piled high with heavy weights break down and hold up the tide. There is confusion and disorder on some roads, say our flying men, and they do their best to add to the fear which is marching with this retreating army. At Reumont and Troisvillers, before our cavalry swept round and captured them, our flying men swooped low and dropped bombs on German columns, causing many casualties and panic. So they did at Le Cateau, before the Connaught Rangers and the Manchesters and Fusilier battalions closed in and entered the town, where Germans were still fighting this morning in the eastern outskirts. For the first time in this war the German army knows the terror of retreat with hostile forces hard upon their heels, and from now until the ending of it that terror will be with them.

The German army has the spirit of defeat. They are thinking only of peace, and do not care about the terms unless they are threatened with extermination. The news of the Kaiser's peace offer has thrown them still more off their mental balance, and if the ending does not come quickly their demoralization will be worse than before. A number of prisoners have surrendered to our cavalry operating east

of Cambrai in the belief that the armistice had already been signed.

Men of the 8th German Division were captured without resistance because, it is reported, they had received the Kaiser's telegram announcing something like consent to President Wilson's propositions. Men of the 2nd German Cyclist Brigade went to sleep at Fresnoy with these dreams of peace, and were made prisoners while sleeping. It is difficult to imagine what will happen to the mental state of these war-weary men if war still goes on for any length of time. I think they will not have any flaming loyalty to the Kaiser and his generals, who are feeding them with hope of getting home again.

Our cavalry and cyclist patrols are doing gallant and useful work, and our infantry is now drawing near the crossings of the River Selle, which is the southern defence of Valenciennes, where the enemy's main lines of communication from Lille, Tournai, and all his northern armies are centred. This threat of ours is a most mortal menace, and it is clear that he will fight desperately to hold this line.

II

The Crossing of the Selle

October 14

In order to cover its retreat and to prevent our forcing the pace too hard along those crowded roads where his transport is strung back in twisted knots of traffic, slashed by our gun-fire and harassed by our flying men, the German command ordered their rear-guard troops to hold out to the death on the River Selle, east of Cambrai, and there during the last two days our men have been trying to force the passage to the further bank.

This River Selle does not look important on the map, and its name is unfamiliar, but for the enemy it was a strong

defensive position, because its banks are cut very sharply down to the stream, 20 feet wide and 5 feet deep, which winds round the villages of Solesmes, Briastre, Neuvilly, Le Cateau, St.-Benin, and St.-Souplet, each one of these places having a machine-gun fortress. The Germans held this line in strength, with field artillery supporting them, and all advantages of ground were on their side, because our men had to attack down a glacis swept by their fire, and make bridges over the river below before they could storm the heights beyond.

This feat was done by the extreme valour of men belonging to English, Scottish, and New Zealand units. Among the English troops were West Ridings and East Yorks, Lancashire Fusiliers, and Manchesters. Some of these men had fought their way towards the river by a series of small battles, very fierce while they lasted, in and around the villages of Clary, Caudry, and Bertry, where the Fort Gurry Horse worked with them.

The Scottish Rifles and Queens of the 33rd Division marched fifteen miles and fought twelve before reaching the River Selle. They passed through Welsh troops, who have won high honour by their long progress and terrific staying power, and took Clary after a sharp battle at nine o'clock on the morning of October 8. Here a number of civilians were in the cellars, and their priest, like that other one at Selvigny, whose narrative I have recorded, saved his church by cutting the wires before the retreating Germans could touch off their explosive charges.

The Scottish Rifles, Queens, and Cameronians of the 33rd Division reached Bertry at two o'clock in the afternoon and the neighbouring village of Troisville, which had been captured by our Dragoon Guards, with Canadian Horse. With assistance from the cavalry they then pushed on to Neuvilly and the banks of the River Selle. Here they realised the deadly nature of the ground ahead of them, when that wide ribbon of water curled beneath sharp-cut banks, upon which the enemy was in strength with massed

machine-guns. For a time they could do nothing in face of that fire, but they had orders to get across, and they set about the job, like many comrades north and south of them faced with the same problem. The river was strewn with tree trunks cut down by the Germans, and some of the men got across by creeping out on these logs among floating brushwood, and others waded across up to their necks in water, but they had to come back because of the hail of machine-gun bullets.

In the night, between dusk and dawn, they made bridges between Montigny and Neuvilly, covered by the Worcesters of the 33rd Division, and yesterday morning the Argyll and Sutherlands and others stormed the passage of the Selle, and fought their way up to the heights on the farther banks, and had desperate fighting on the railway between Amerval and Neuvilly, in the German main line of resistance. The Germans fought hard and bravely, especially the men of their 5th Cyclist Brigade and 34th Reserve Division from Metz.

Further north, above Neuvilly, Lancashire Fusiliers, Manchesters, and West Ridings of the 17th Division had succeeded in crossing the stream by wading and log-crawling under the frightful sweep of bullets, and found many Germans in a camouflaged trench on the other bank. They cut their way through, smashing down the new wire, and went on 800 yards to the railway, killing many of the enemy and taking nearly fifty prisoners.

A little farther north still the East Yorkshires of the 37th Division who had crossed the river the day before had to come back as best they could under fierce counter-attacks, and yesterday morning, with Manchesters, made the crossing again. Sappers made bridges while they waited, bridges of a frail kind and insecure because the bridge builders were working under fire, which spoilt a good job, and these sappers actually held them firm as they stood in the water, while the infantry went across. They had desperate fighting along the railway and in the village of Neu-

villy, where the Germans had made a machine-gun post in every house, and had machine-guns firing out of the windows and from the roofs of buildings, and the tower of the church.

The New Zealanders at this time were fighting their way to Briastre on the river bank below the high ground on the other side called Bellevue, from which the enemy could see every movement they made. These New Zealanders had already been fighting for days, since their marvellous capture of Welsh Ridge and La Vacquerie on October 2 and 3, and their capture of Lesdain and Esnes on October 6, where the New Zealand Rifles and a Canterbury battalion fired their Lewis guns from their hips, captured many prisoners, and repulsed the counter-attacks which the enemy made with a captured Tank of ours.

That was a battle of Tanks, and one of ours charged a German-British Tank, outflanked it, and poured in a broadside which blew it to bits. The New Zealanders went on again to the villages of Beauvois and Fontaine and Viesly (whence our line ran to St.-Hilaire and Avesnes, taken by the Guards and 24th Division), driving the enemy before them, and on October 11 took Briastre, on the River Selle, where they found 170 starving civilians crouching in their cellars, including an old woman of eighty-two. These poor people were unable to get out because of the barrage, and were in a most pitiable state. Yesterday, the New Zealanders forced the passage of the river and fought their way up to the heights of Bellevue and are fighting there now.

Amidst all this fighting and beyond it, there is another drama of a most strange and pitiful kind. It is the tragedy of those French civilians whom our men are now meeting as they capture village after village, where these old people and young women and children are waiting in their cellars for deliverance, hearing the approach of the battle, the louder noise of our guns, the crash of shells above them, the deadly rattle of machine-gun fire down their streets, at last cheers or the tramp of our men. On the

roadsides and in the villages just taken I meet these people and talk with them, and the look of them and the things they say—such tragic and passionate things, such simple and frightful things—reveal the world of agony in human hearts divided from us for four years by German lines, and now coming through to us as that barrier is broken. Yesterday I met many of them on a far journey through those places which our men have just captured, and in one town—for Bohain is more than a village—where the enemy is still close outside the walls.

A long street straggled past mean houses into the centre of the town where there were factories and factory chimneys and big warehouses and a tall red-brick church. It was in this long street that I met the first group of civilians, though I had seen women and children, through cottage windows and standing in their doorways, and was startled by their starving look and the waxen pallor of their faces. Three men came and spoke to me, one a handsome middle-aged man with a spade beard and a distinguished way of speech, the second a little old gnome-like man of seventy or so, with a rugged, labourer's face, and the third a tall man with a short black beard and high cheek bones and a queer light in his eyes. It was the man with the spade beard who spoke first and fastest. He took my hand and said:

"You are an English soldier, come and see what the Germans have done in Bohain. Go round these streets and speak to our women. Go to our town hall, which cost great sums of money, and see how, before they left, they blew it up and burnt it to the ground. Go to our factories, which were filled with machinery by which our people earned their bread before the war, and you will see that they have left nothing; not one bar of iron, not one little wheel; nothing, nothing. Tell your soldiers and your people that the Germans are devils, bandits, brigands, pigs, and brutes. Tell them how they made your prisoners suffer; how they starved them so that they dropped dead as they walked."

He pointed to a little field through a gap in the red-brick

houses, and said: "There are graves of English soldiers who starved to death in Bohain." He pointed to the doorway close to us, and said, "Outside that house I saw one of your men drop down dead from hunger."

"Oh, my dear sir," said the little old man, "the suffering of your English soldiers was very bad. They came in so strong and big, and gradually we watched them weaken until they were too weak to stand, and they were just living skeletons. Our women tried to give them food, though they had not enough themselves, and were struck and fined and put in prison for sparing a little of their bread."

I spoke to some girls standing in a doorway, pretty girls and very neat and clean, but with that dreadful waxen pallor which belonged to all people in Bohain. They laughed and wept as they talked to me, and both the laughter and their tears came from weakness, because they had had no food, not even one little bit of bread for several days, and were starving still. They told me that the Germans had shelled Bohain just before I came in, and had killed one girl and a man, and that the night before they had fired gas shells and poisoned four people so that they had died.

One girl told me the strangest thing. "When the English were drawing near to Bohain," she said, "all the German soldiers began to laugh and shout. Some of them called out to me: 'The English will soon be here. They are already at Fremont. Bravo! The war will soon be over.' They had only one thought, monsieur. It was to get taken prisoner by the English so that they should have good food, for they are starving and never get enough to eat, and they want the war to be over quickly and do not mind how."

III

The Last Battle of Flanders

October 15

There is no sign of an impending armistice on the Western Front this morning, and the only hint of its possibility

was in the speech of German prisoners brought down by Allied troops in the new attack launched this morning in Flanders.

It was an international battle up there, between Menin and the coast, and above all it was the Belgians' day out, and once again the Belgian Army was in the field inspired with an ambition to advance into their own country and to be the first to carry tidings of liberation to their people.

The first advance in Flanders had been made on September 28 when our Second Army attacked without preliminary bombardment on a front of four and a half miles south of the Ypres-Zonnebeke road. The 14th, 35th, 29th, and 9th Divisions delivered the initial assault, supported in later stages of the battle by the 41st and 36th Divisions. On the left the Belgian army attacked as far north as Dixmude. The enemy had been holding his position thinly, and by the end of the day we had driven them far afield and had captured Kortevilde, Zandvoorde, and Beclelaere.

To me, a spectator of to-day's drama, which is intensified in interest because of the peace proposals, which promise a swift ending to this war, it was strange to be in Flanders again after following the campaign down south by Cambrai and St.-Quentin. I had an idea then that I should never see Flemish battlefields again under fire, but this morning I went out through Ypres, as on so many days last year, and saw again those ruins which are built into the fabric of our history and of our most tragic memories in this war, and went across those frightful fields up through Potije and Zonnebeke, past Inverness Copse and Glencorse Wood, up to Broodseinde and the crest of Passchendaele, still littered with the wreckage of those German pill-boxes for which our men fought so desperately, and still pitted with those shell-holes and craters over which our men stumbled in bogs and lakes on their way to the high ridges.

Time was, and not so long ago, when one could not put one's nose into Ypres or out of it without having a German

5.9 burst extremely close, and when there was fierce and terrible harassing fire over all this vast belt of country beyond Ypres, and when our gunners below the railway embankment at Zonnebeke and in bog-holes below Abraham Heights and Passchendaele were always being searched for by high explosives. To-day, after the German retreat, this country has lost its menace, and there are few new shell-craters among the old ones, and there is traffic up the roads, where men used to walk in single file only under the cover of night and then were in danger of death. But they are the same old roads in the same old Flanders mud, and it was an astonishing sight to-day to see our tide of war streaming along those tracks, a great Army on the move, across that ravaged land where there is no living tree in the charred stumps of woods, and one wide vista of infernal chaos.

The scene around Passchendaele and along the whole sweep of ridges for many miles is the worst in the world, except the way to Bapaume, and in its old solitude it haunted one's soul with its foul aspect. But to-day it was redeemed by masses of men marching and riding blithely through it, and going forward to the flats, elated by a sense of victory, certain victory now, of which nothing can rob them, and peace not far away. Belgian and French and British gunners shared the roads with their limbers and transport.

Our flying men and anti-aircraft gunners had their camps among Belgian camps, where men with tasselled caps exchanged cigarettes with them, and waved hands to them, and shouted out "All goes well" as fresh batches of German prisoners came down the boggy tracks. Belgian ambulances and Red Cross cars, like those which, years ago, I passed when Dixmude was in flames, were established near old German pill-boxes, for which English and Scottish and Irish soldiers fought terrible battles not long ago.

French troops were marching forward to drive further into the German lines, and they had the hard look of men who have been through all the worst of the war, and now

go to claim their victory. "How far to the front?" asked a French colonel, leaning forward in his saddle as he passed me; and I said, "I don't know, *mon colonel.* Things move so quickly nowadays, and I hear that our men are going on now before Ledeghem." "Nous les aurons," laughed a gunner, perched on a heavy howitzer, crawling up the road; "we shall have them—before they make this Peace."

The troops moved forward in an endless tide, a marvellous sight as one saw their columns winding away over this barren land like a long snake in the far distance. Down below there was Roulers, where the French were fighting. Its church spire tapered above the trees, which were beyond the zone of the all-destroying fire. To the right were Ledeghem, from which Scottish battalions of the 9th Division attacked to-day, and Moorseele, where the 29th and 36th Divisions were engaged. There was astonishing little shell-fire after the first bombardment, and having heard the tumult of great gun-fire in this country day after day and month after month last year, I was astounded by the absence of this noise, and by the uncanny quietude down there in the slopes.

Behind me were some big howitzers of ours, enormous brutes, who lifted up their throats and bellowed every minute or two, so that one's scalp seemed to be lifted by the concussion, and some of our field batteries below Ledeghem were hard at work; but it was nothing, nothing at all, in comparison with the bombardments that used to continue here for days, when 2000 guns of ours used to open fire in the mists of dawn. The Allied troops were working round those Flemish villages and towns in the low country, silently, and what defence the enemy put up was all by machine-gun fire from the railway embankments, concrete shelters, and strong points hidden in the trees.

Their wounded and our wounded came back together. In several ambulances I saw Germans, French, Belgians, English, and Scottish soldiers mixed up as they had been picked up from advanced stations. Slogging slowly

through the muddy tracks came the walking wounded, German soldiers without escort stumbling stiffly along as though weighed down by their heavy helmets amidst groups of Belgians with bandaged faces and arms, or coats cut away, leaving them bare on one side from shoulder to waist.

Groups of Jocks of the 9th Division lightly hit supported each other or sat down in the mud together for a rest on the way back to the casualty clearing stations, or discussed their fighting with the troops who had been on their right by Moorseele and down to Gheluwe.

It was all the same tale they told. The enemy had put up a fight with his machine-guns and then surrendered. Scots, with Belgians on their left, had gone fast, smashing through first the line of German resistance north of Ledeghem to St.-Pieter, and getting on to high ground west of Winkel-St.-Eloi, with Belgians going grandly on their left and coming forward all the time. Troops fighting on the outskirts of Moorseele, where the Germans of the 1st Bavarian Reserve Division had fought hard against them, had strong opposition, but they had taken over 100 prisoners from that place already; and, altogether, with their English and Scottish comrades of their corps, at least 600, as I counted roughly for myself, seeing them come back.

The chief characteristic of this morning's fighting, as far as our men were engaged, was the strength with which the enemy held his front line. During most of the recent battles he has defended his front line lightly, relying upon his "main line of resistance" farther back. But this time, expecting our attack, he manned his front line quickly, and orders were given to his men to hold on to the death. Many of them fought with extreme courage, and opposite the northern portion of our front their machine-guns rushed through our barrage to meet our men in the open. Among those who did so were those of the 1st Bavarian Reserve Infantry Division, who fought desperately between Ledeghem and the Kazelberg. Their support battalion was to

have manned the second line on the Menin-Roulers railway, but our men were too quick for them, and got there first.

This strength in the front line was general along our length of attack, and it was not until that was broken that our troops could get forward more easily towards the River Heule, near Courtrai, where they are confronted by a stream 11 feet wide, held as a defensive line by the enemy. In some places the German soldiers did not fight well, and one of their officers remarked, "What can you expect, when they look forward to an armistice in two or three days?"

One German officer came over, very smartly dressed, and said he was wearing his peace clothes. The 6th Cavalry Division, which suffered very heavily in the Cambrai fighting, is engaged on this northern front, and, in spite of their losses in prisoners, are called "The war prolongers" by the German line regiments, on account of their *moral,* or *stimmung,* as they call it.

Some of our troops of the 34th and 30th Divisions attacking farther south this morning along the line of the Lys, met some resistance in the front line, in the neighbourhood of Wervicq, which I saw burning this morning from the heights of Passchendaele, a long streamer of smoke spreading across the countryside. There was a steady sweep of machine-gun fire on them from the other side of the Lys, and it was not an easy way along.

There are as yet no certain numbers of prisoners, but I reckon them as about a thousand up to midday, judging from those I saw under escort. Most of them were certain that an armistice would be arranged within a few days, and were rejoiced at the prospect of peace. When some of them were told "that means that Germany is utterly defeated and lost," they said, "that does not matter so long as we get Peace, for otherwise we shall be in a worse state."

There was a group of sixteen officers in one batch, and I noticed how smartly they saluted, and it seemed to me with them, as with those at Cambrai, that it was the salute

of men to their victors, for never in the old days were they as punctilious as this.

I do not know the exact success of our French Allies on our left, but it is reported that they are all round Roulers, which they are not entering yet because of explosions, and that they are making good progress. I know that the Belgians have taken many prisoners, because I saw them escorting them back and counting their birds in the cages. For the Belgians, above all, it is a day of hope, because they see before them as a beckoning finger in the mists the belfry of Bruges, and, as I have said, they are on their way home.

October 16

The battle in Flanders, which began yesterday morning and is continuing to-day in the direction of Thourout and Courtrai, is being fought by combined Belgian, French, and British armies under the supreme command of King Albert. Our Second Army, under General Sir Herbert Plumer, is on the right of this group of armies, with the Belgians on the left between Roulers and Menin, and the French are in the centre around Roulers itself, which they had the honour of taking in touch with the Belgians, again south of Thourout.

This international action gained important success along the whole line of attack, and it is interesting that in number of prisoners the captures were almost exactly the same for the troops of each nation, amounting to about 4000 yesterday under each flag—that is, to some 12,000 in all. Our exact number of prisoners counted yesterday on the Second Army front was 131 officers and 3592 men, not counting wounded. Our own troops also captured some 50 guns.

Yesterday I went into the French area, and while the battle was in progress stood by the French officers who were watching its progress, as far as any clue could be had through the screen of wet mist. A French officer, observ-

ing from a pile of ruin, offered me a light from his cigarette, and, pointing to gun flashes round Roulers, said, "We are getting on. If all goes well we shall soon have half Belgium. If the enemy does not get out we shall drive him out."

It is certain that the enemy did not mean to get out yesterday without a heavy fight for it. I have already told in my previous message how on our line of attack he held his front far more strongly than usual, putting his weight of men there rather than in a main line of resistance farther back. It was the same on the Belgian and French front. There was severe fighting before the German front lines could be broken round Roulers Winkel-St.-Eloi, and other places, with Flemish names hard to write and to say, between Roulers and Thourout.

All this country between the Flanders ridges is in the flats cut up by small canals and hedges and ditches and avenues of tall poplar trees, and the enemy had made use of these natural features for defensive purposes. His machine-gunners lined the ditches under cover of the hedges, and had cut down many of the poplars to make barricades of tree trunks across the roads, and had smashed the bridges and the canals. There were also many pill-boxes, exactly similar to those concrete shelters below Passchendaele and Pilkem, which our men found such hard nuts to crack in the battles of Flanders last year.

The German machine-gunners, driven from their ditches and routed out of the pill-boxes, then fell back into the villages, and used little Flemish houses with red-tiled roofs as machine-gun fortresses, from which they fired at close range when Belgian, French, and British soldiers forced their way into the streets.

So it was at Roulers, which the French encircled yesterday morning, and at Winkel-St.-Eloi, captured by the Belgians, with Scottish battalions of the 9th Division on their right. One by one the German machine-guns were silenced, and German garrisons surrendered when they found

themselves cut off and hopeless. Then from below the houses there came up other people, strange to see in bullet-swept streets. Old women came up out of their cellars, trembling and crying out to the Belgians and French searching their houses for living Germans over the bodies of the dead. Men in peasant clothes, haggard and pale under their beards, shouted out hoarse words of welcome and said, "We are saved."

I saw three of these men from Roulers marching back with some soldiers to give any information they had which might be useful to us, but the old women stayed on to make coffee for a few of their rescuers.

The German prisoners came back in big batches, slouching through the mud and staring with curious eyes at the tide of our traffic of men and guns, surging up over those frightful fields where dead trees stick up like gallows out of the ooze and slime. Many of them had fought bravely and desperately. Some of them had not fought at all. Some of the machine-gunners of the 39th German Division on our front surrendered without firing a shot. Some officers put up their hands when they saw their men would not fight, and said, "All is lost."

One body of our men captured 9 officers and 304 men when their own strength at this place, near Wervicq, was only 420 and their casualties 16.

The German soldiers seemed to know everything about recent events, and their constant refrain was, "We want Peace." They are persuaded that everything is over, and asked whether the Armistice would be signed to-night. The Kaiser must go, they said, and when asked about the Crown Prince, shrugged their shoulders and said, "The Crown Prince does not count. Nobody will bother about him." Some of them even made jokes about the fate of Germany, and when some of us said, "What about 'Deutschland über Alles'?" they said, "Now Germany is the under-dog."

This morning the advance of the Groupement des Armées de Flandres, as King Albert's group of armies is called,

continued all along the line, the French and Belgians going forward closer to Thourout, and the British striking closer to Courtrai and Comines. Some of our infantry have crossed the Lys Canal below Comines, near Warneton, and others are driving slowly forward in touch with the retreating rear-guards. Our men are working without the help of Tanks, which would find bad country to cross in this low and swampy ground, but the French have many of their own Tanks, which have been of great service to the infantry. The light Renauds of the French Tank Corps cruised forward like destroyers and struck terror among the German machine-gunners, whose emplacements were outflanked by them.

There is hardly any need for me to point out the significance of this new campaign. A glance at the map will explain it more than many words. Our combined advance has already become a threat to the Germans on the coast between Nieuport and Ostend, so that they must withdraw from the narrow corridor or have the door slammed upon them. Farther south our advance towards Courtrai puts the enemy into a deep pocket at Lille and the great manufacturing suburbs of Tourcoing and Roubaix, while south again Douai is almost encircled, now that our men are north of it at Flers and south of it beyond Cambrai. All this northern part of France and Belgium is, therefore, unsafe for the enemy, and if he does not withdraw as quickly as can be he may be caught, not in one trap, but in several, with losses in men and material which will increase the ruin of his armies.

That is the military side of things, but I confess that now I am more interested in the psychology of those last reserves of the German armies in the field, who find themselves a rear-guard of despair, the last counters in the dreadful gamble for world-power which was played by their Emperor and chiefs and lost legions, whose only chance of escape is by surrender.

There is no doubt that they are clinging for the moment

to the hope of an armistice which will end their misery. It is due to queer things working in the brains of these men that when a French colonel entered Roulers he found some German soldiers sitting round a piano in a cellar with Flemish peasants singing—of all songs—"La Marseillaise."

October 17

Up in Flanders, where the war began—began at least for us and the French after the gates of Belgium had been smashed wide open by the invading army—there is now a movement of massed armies towards the end of the war.

By the steady pressure of Belgian, French, and British troops under the command of King Albert the Germans are being driven back from places which were on their main lines of communication between the coast and their centre, and now being lost to them, are like open doors into their back parlours. The Belgian cavalry to-day are reported to be working round Thielt, sixteen miles from Ghent. French entered Lichtervelde this morning and their patrols are about Thourout, ten miles from Bruges. Ostend is almost within sight.

Knowing his inevitable withdrawal is at hand from this western part of Belgium, the Germans are not inclined to give battle here on a big scale, and their rear guards are being sacrificed to gain time for the main retreat.

Farther south, where our own Second Army troops are fighting on the right of the Belgians and French in this "group of the armies of Flanders," commanded by the Belgian King, the enemy is gradually finding himself in the far-flung loop of attack which, by our capture of the outskirts of Courtrai last night, following our steady advance north and east of Cambrai and Douai, which was entered by our 8th Division, is gradually encircling a large territory of northern France, containing the great textile and manufacturing cities of Lille, Tourcoing, and Roubaix,

from which so much of the wealth of France flowed in time of peace.

This morning, at various points in that wide half-circle, our troops of the 34th and 30th Divisions tightened its loop and drew it closer to those cities. They crossed the canal south of Menin by the fine gallantry of some Engineers who bridged the canal during the night, and so penetrated the town of Halluin, three miles north of Tourcoing, the enormous suburb of Lille itself. Menin was entered by patrols in the early morning, and taken by our troops without more fighting.

South of the canal we have gained the slopes of the high ground called the Paulbucq, 3000 yards south-east of Wervicq. We have pushed our line farther east from Armentières, and then go south to Pont-à-Vendin, and on the east side of the Haute-Deule Canal, where several villages were captured yesterday by the 57th and 59th Divisions, bringing us very close to the southern and western sides of Lille. All this means that we are gradually closing in upon those immense towns where during all the years of this war the enemy had many of his headquarter establishments and cowed great populations of civilians.

In the first wild stampede of panic-stricken people when the enemy's columns struck through Belgium towards the northern edge of France, I saw the crowds of refugees who poured down to Calais from Lille and its suburbs, and in those days of August, 1914, it looked as if the world had been tipped on end and that nations were falling over their boundaries. They were the lucky ones who escaped in time. But tens of thousands were not quick enough, or by poverty were unable to leave, or thought the war would end so quickly that they could stay without much misery.

During recent days there has been another exodus from Lille, Tourcoing, and Roubaix; all men and boys between sixteen and sixty have been driven farther back, so that when we take Lille they will not be there to increase the number of soldiers on our side or our power of labour.

They are the forced labourers of the enemy, building new lines of defence before his frontiers in case we do not grant him peace.

But in Lille and those other towns there are large populations of old people and women and children, and they must now be dreaming of the deliverance which is at hand, and yearning for the days to go quick and quicker, when at last they shall be free of German rule, and of that nightmare of laws and punishments and oppressions which has worn them down through all these years.

No message comes to us from those excited hearts. There is still a barrier of machine-guns between us and them, and it is only by our meetings with other people whom we have liberated in recent days in those villages south of Cambrai and at Roulers, and in many farmsteads where our men have found them during the last day or two near Courtrai and Menin, that we may guess how they are stirred by the enormous hope and belief that all their patience through four long years, all their courage, which often was at fainting-point, all their wounds of pride and their lean, grey days of waiting for the war to end, will at last be rewarded by liberty and new life on our side of the line.

Not only in Lille and its surrounding towns, but in Ghent and Bruges, large numbers of people must be watching the lights in the sky at night, seeing them come nearer as our loop of fire is drawn closer to them, and laughing or weeping, according to their mood, because the flashes of Belgian and French and British guns, brighter and closer each night, are messages to them of the rescue that is near at hand. They may have many days and, perhaps, weeks, to wait still, before the enemy makes his flight from their towns, but they know now that the end of their agony is not far away.

The German Government has issued a statement that these people are becoming excited by the fear of bombardment. But we are sweeping on beyond the towns, and they may fall into our hands by the flight of their garrison, who

must already be preparing to go. They are going now from the small towns and villages which our men took yesterday and to-day without hard fighting, and their fringe of machine-gunners is withdrawn as soon as our men press forward, if there is time to escape death or capture. All along the line this is now the condition of our Allied drive in Flanders, and the enemy is engaged in a wide rear-guard action, avoiding battle except in places vital to the safety of his retreat.

Prisoners taken lately deny any plan of general destruction, and say that they are ordered to destroy only buildings of military importance. No such plea could be given in the case of buildings I saw destroyed immediately before the German retreat on the south side of Cambrai and Le Cateau, but Roulers is still in fair condition, and apart from bedding and linen, has not been looted in so wholesale a way as Cambrai and other places.

Many prisoners arrive in our lines with pamphlets about the German proposal for an armistice, issued to them officially, and bidding them keep up their hearts, because the war will soon be over. They believe that, and if their belief totters their spirit also will fall into deeper depths of despair. That I think, will happen throughout their army, but whether, after that, they will stiffen or weaken, I cannot guess.

Things should move quickly in the north, now that the French and Belgian cavalry are operating around Thourout and Thielt. I saw the French cavalry riding over the Flanders ridges, with their lances high and their steel casques wet in the mist, and their lean horses at the gallop as they neared the lines. It was a wonderful and stirring sight, for all the men looked fine soldiers, hard as steel, and they stared forward through the mists to the great adventure before them, when they should ride back through north France and Belgium with the German army in retreat before them.

October 18

The enemy has abandoned Lille and Tourcoing, those great industrial towns of northern France which he held so long as his trump cards in the devil's gamble of this war, and we are following him up. We have taken Lombartzyde on the coast, and have captured Ostend. From one end of the line to the other the German armies are in retreat from great portions of France and Belgium, and it is a landslide of all their ambitions and their military power.

To-day I have seen scenes of history of which many people have been dreaming through all these years of war, until at last they were sick with deferred hope. I have seen Belgian and French soldiers riding through liberated towns, cheered by people who have been prisoners of war in their own houses for all these dreary years, under hostile rule which was sometimes cruel and always hard, so that their joy now is wonderful to see and makes something break in one's heart at the sight of it, because one understands by these women's faces, by the light in the children's eyes, and by the tears of old, gnarled men, what this rescue means to them and what they have suffered.

In Lille the first news of the enemy's flight was received by our airmen to-day, who saw people signalling to them with their handkerchiefs, waving frantically to give some message. Our airmen guessed that it was joyful news, and could mean only one thing. After that a civilian came over to our lines and said, "You can go in; the enemy has gone in the night." Our patrols felt forward and encountered no opposition.

This regaining of Lille will be the most wonderful occurrence since the combined offensive of the Allies on the Western Front in August last, and is the prize of many victories, won by the heroism of young officers and men and by the fine strategy of Marshal Foch, whose brain has been behind all these movements of men. One feels the horror of this war is lifting, and that the iron ramparts of the enemy, so strong against us year after year in spite of the

desperate efforts of millions of gallant men who dashed themselves against those barriers, have yielded at last, and that many gates are open for our men to pass through on their way to victory.

This morning I went again over the old belt of battle-fields out from Ypres and beyond Passchendaele, through which the combined armies of Belgium, France, and Britain struggled and surged to keep up with their vanguards. Over the shell-craters and the rutted roads, sometimes axle-deep in mud, in slow columns of turbulent traffic poured our guns and transport of the three nations following up the pursuit, bringing up food and ammunition and men, and more men.

The pursuit is not a dashing charge. Men shout to each other in three tongues to clear the way, and ease themselves by furious shouts and gusts of laughter, because it is all so slow. But it is too fast for the enemy. Before he is ready to leave our men are on his heels. Our horse artillery is firing along his tracks before he can escape with his heavy loads. His rear-guards are captured before the main body is out of danger. It is very slow, this pursuit, when seen from our side of things, but as quick as a hurrying death to masses of German soldiers. It quickens beyond the old deep belt of strife, for beyond that there are good roads, except where the Germans have blown great craters, and this morning I went for many miles through country where there are unshelled fields, where there are cabbage patches, and neat farmsteads, and cottage gardens, and villages with red-tiled roofs, and houses with glass windows—unbroken glass, by all the gods!—so that it seems like precious jewels to eyes tired of rubbish-heaps that were fair towns, like Ypres.

At Roulers I met some French officers and men who fought their way into this town, a fine old Flemish town, with a tall belfry and a spacious market square, and many old churches, with noble towers. The Germans did not

want to leave this place. They fought for it hard, girdling it with machine-guns, and having many field batteries to protect it. But the French forced their way round on two sides, and on the third side a French battalion waited to get a signal that they should attack frontally. Some of these men were machine-gunners, who had marched thirty-five kilometres before reaching their line of attack, and then they had to wait under very fierce shell-fire, but at last they sprang up and went forward into Roulers. There was a dreadful sweep of bullets in the streets from German machine-guns, and one party of them, with a young officer I met this morning, came face to face with a field battery in the street. The German gunners fired six rounds. Then one of them shouted out, "Don't shoot; don't shoot, I am an Alsatian," and he made the others surrender and took his own lieutenant prisoner.

As soon as the French entered, the Belgian people emerged from their cellars and, with cries of joy, ran towards the French soldiers and embraced them. One officer I met, a commandant and a most gallant-looking soldier, was a priest who before the war was canon at the Cathedral of Besançon and professor at that college. "It was the first time I had ever been embraced by a girl since I became a priest," he told me, laughing, "and I said, 'Hullo, my little one, this will never do,' and I pretended to box her ears before telling her that I had no right to her kiss. But after all it was a kiss of peace, and I was not really angry about it."

The Mayor came rushing up and said, "Be careful, for God's sake, this town is mined." And, truly enough, there were big charges of dynamite and trench-mortar bombs, twenty bombs to each frightful charge, in the belfry and under the towers of the other churches and at the cross-roads. But by some freak of carelessness, perhaps, because they had no other men, the German commander of Roulers had left this mining to be done by soldiers who

did not carry out their orders, except at the cross-roads and under one church tower. The glorious old belfry of Roulers still stands.

And all the town stands so that it is still fair to see from the outside, with its beautiful Flemish houses. But each house was gutted before the Germans left. They stripped off the panelling, took away the doors and the window-panes, and every bit of furniture, so that Roulers is nothing but a shell, and there is nothing left to the inhabitants. The Germans wished to send everybody away, and threatened to turn them out at the bayonet-point, but many hid —one man I met hid for ten days with four comrades in the chimney of a factory—and the others refused to go, and showed such passionate emotion that the German garrison was afraid to enforce the order.

There was an astounding situation at Courtrai to-day. Our Irishmen had been feeling their way close to it, with sharp fighting at Heule and other places on the north, the enemy's rear-guards falling back before them when their pressure came too hard, and last night they gained possession of that quarter of the town which is divided by the canal from the main streets and market-place and the famous old belfry which has rung out the history of Courtrai for many hundreds of years, in triumph and tragedy.

Some Engineers tried to gain bridgeheads across the canal by building pontoons, while they were swept by machine-gun fire from the opposite banks, and succeeded in doing this, so that some of our men crossed by much daring and in most deadly risk. One officer of ours forced his way into a house where there were some Germans with trench-mortars, and when he was blown out of one room he went into another, and was blown out of that and then into a trench near the house. It was far too deadly a place for our men to stay in in small numbers, and they were drawn back to the west side of the canal, where they remained to-day, still holding at least a third of Courtrai on that side.

Among those now in the town are the Queen's and the Middlesex.

What makes the astonishing drama here is that Courtrai is filled with between 35,000 and 40,000 civilians. There, again, the enemy tried to force them to leave, and sent away any able-bodied boys and men between fourteen and sixty, but could not induce large numbers of others to go, now that they knew the English were so close up.

Many men hid themselves; others adopted an attitude of passive resistance, and the German soldiers were afraid to use force. All the women, except a few well-to-do people who went away to Brussels, remained to take the risk of bombardment, with liberty as the great prize of courage. So that vast population is still there, for the most part on the other side of the city beyond the canal, waiting and watching for the moment when the Germans leave and our troops enter to rescue them. But from the west side of the canal many people are coming through our lines, and our machine-gunners, lying in ditches and behind walls and in newly dug trenches, see women with perambulators coming towards them, and old women hobbling up with children at their skirts, and men trudging slowly among the patter of machine-gun bullets. They tell the tale of their sufferings like those others I have seen, but they have the hope that their beautiful old city will not be destroyed, because the German soldiers themselves say that they will not blow it up, in spite of orders.

It has been a wonderful day in this war, and it will be followed by others, when our Allied troops will enter many historic towns and give back to France and Belgium much of the country that has been so long divorced from them. The enemy's retreat will now go fast, and from hundreds of thousands of hearts, scarred, if not broken, by this war's long agony, there is going up a cry of joy, because the enemy is departing from them and liberty is theirs again, and tidings of those they love on our side of the lines, and peace for them however long the war may last.

IV

The Entry into Lille

October 19

To go into Lille this morning was as good as anything that can come to a man who has seen four years of war, and I am glad that I have lived to see the liberation of that city. I saw the joy of hundreds of thousands of people, who, during all those four years, have suffered tragic things, unforgettable outrages, to their liberty and spirit, and have dwelt under a dark spell of fear, and have waited month after month, year after year, with a faith that sometimes weakened but never died, for the rescue that has now come to them. It seems a miracle to them now that it has come suddenly, and they fill their streets like people in a dream, hugging their gladness, yet almost afraid that it is unreal, and that they may wake again to find swarms of field-grey men about them, and guns in their gardens, and German law hard upon them.

I went into Lille this morning very early, but the streets were already thronged with people, with well-dressed women and children, and men of all ages in black coats, such as one sees outside the war zone, and never before this within such close sound of guns. It is a fine city, with broad avenues and streets, and parks where all the leaves are turned to crinkled gold, and everywhere it was draped with the flags of England and France. They were flags which these people had hidden until this day should come, hidden carefully, for it was prison for any French civilian discovered with such symbols, and now they waved from every balcony. Around the city all the bridges have been blown up—the last act of the enemy at half-past one yesterday morning before his flight, and most of our troops were still on the west and south side of the canal and had not entered the city. But they had built foot-bridges here and there, and I crossed on one and walked into the heart of

people who were ready to give a warm welcome to any Englishman in khaki. They opened their arms in a great embrace of gratitude and love for those who have helped to rescue them from their bondage, and I saw the joy of the vast crowds, and the light in the thousands of eyes was like sunlight about one, and in a few hours one made hundreds of friends, who thrust gifts into one's hands and poured out their emotion in words of utter simplicity and truth, and thanked one poor individual as though he were all an army and had done this thing alone. It was overwhelming and uplifting.

Before I had gone far up the first avenue of Lille I was surrounded by a great crowd. A lady broke through the ring, and, clasping both hands, said, "I embrace you for the gladness you have brought us." She kissed me on both cheeks, and it was the signal for general embraces. Pretty girls came forward and offered their cheeks, and small boys pushed through to kiss a man bending down to them, and old men put their hands on one's shoulders and touched one's face with their grizzled moustaches, and mothers held up their children to be kissed. This did not last for a few minutes; it lasted all the time I was in Lille—for hours.

Tens of thousands of people were in the streets, and my hands were clasped by many hundreds of them, by all close enough to take my hand. Children walked hand in hand with me for a little way, as though they had known me for years, and talked all the time of their gladness because the Germans had gone. Then other children took their places and other groups gathered and one was closed in by new crowds, who seized one's hands and cried, "Welcome, welcome. Long live England." Sometimes the same faces reappeared. One continued conversations begun at one end of the street. One made closer friends with people who had given all their friendship, offered all hospitality after one minute.

"Every one began their conversation in English, though most of them finished in French. "Good morning," "Good

day," "How are you?" "We are very glad to see you," "We have great joy to-day." For everybody in Lille has been learning these words, so that they might say them when this day of deliverance came, and now they said them with wonderful gladness.

But many times in the crowds I heard English voices, and ladies came forward a little, and groups parted so that we might talk. They had been caught in Lille when the Germans came, and had suffered this four years' agony. "We have longed for this day," said one of them, "and now it is like a dream. We can hardly believe that all those grey men have gone, and that we are free."

Several of them spoke of two English women who have done splendid work in Lille for English prisoners—Miss Wood and Miss Butler, who devoted themselves to help men who were helpless, and whose sufferings, as I shall have to tell, were frightful.

There are nearly a hundred English people now in Lille, and I think I must have met half of them to-day here and there in crowds, for just a clasp of hands and a word or two. There were English wives of French officers, and English schoolgirls and little governesses. And they were out in the streets with flowers and flags. Some of these flowers lie beside me as I write, and next to them cigars and cigarettes and little cakes, thrust into my hands by people with a light in their eyes, the light that was better than sunshine in the heart of Lille.

I see all these figures again as I write. A little boy dressed as a Zouave, with a great tricolour waving above his yellow hair. Two sisters and two brothers, who kept close, telling all the tale of their four years' life in Lille, straightly as to an elder brother, laughing a little now and then at all their sufferings and all their fears now that the spell has been lifted.

An American doctor of Lille, who took me into his house, where I sat in a pretty *salon* and drank a glass of wine with him and saw his secret cupboard, where he had

hidden his brass ornaments from the enemy who had demanded every scrap of brass in Lille, and in these apartments as elegant as any in London or Paris, as though a thousand miles remote from war though only a mile or two, I now heard many things of German brutality and German oppression and the tragedy of the besieged city.

Then there was the English clergyman, who for four years has ministered to the English wounded and recited prayers over English dead. Mr. Moore is his name, and his housekeeper is Miss Browne, of Beverley, in Yorkshire, and his cat is called "Bunny," and he has people in England who will be glad to hear, after all this time, that clergyman and housekeeper and cat have survived the ordeal of war all this time. It is strange how quickly one learns little things like that in Lille, because every one is one's friend.

To those people it was wonderful that they have regained their liberty by the arrival of British troops—there are Lancashire men of the 57th and 59th Divisions in Lille to-day—but it is no less astonishing to us to go inside that city—in twenty minutes by motor-car from our old lines at Armentières. I passed through Armentières to-day, a mass of shapeless ruin, and thought of all the death that has been there while Lille remained an unattainable place.

I wonder if any one of our sentries in the trenches by Chapelle Armentières ever established spiritual contact with that city, full of human yearning, as he stared over the parapet and saw through the mists the tall chimneys of Lille. Women lay awake, as they told me to-day, and cried out, "When will the English come?" Children wept themselves to sleep, as their mothers told me this morning, because another day had passed and the English had not come. "We had so long to wait for you, so very long," said many of these people to-day.

After the first terror of the German occupation and the first nagging of the law, which regulated all their lives,

forbade them to be out in the streets after eight o'clock in the evening, and shut them up in their houses like naughty children at three in the afternoon when the German commandant was annoyed with some complaint, one of their worst days came when just before Easter 1916, 8000 young women of Lille were forcibly seized and sent away to work in the fields hundreds of miles from their homes.

It was a reign of terror for every girl in Lille and for her parents. Different quarters in the town were chosen for this conscription of the girls, and machine-guns were posted at each end of the street, and families were ordered to gather in the doorways, when German officers came round and made an arbitrary choice, saying to one girl, "You!" and to another, "You!" and then ordered their men to take them.

Mr. Moore, a clergyman, told me that some girls he knew were dragged out of their beds and carried screaming away. They were girls in all conditions of life, and a young one I met to-day told me that she was chosen, but escaped by threatening to kill herself rather than go. For it was to be a life of misery and horror to any girl of decent instincts.

One of them who was taken and spent six months in this forced labour told me that she had no change of linen all that time, and slept on a truss of straw in an old barn, at first with men who were put into the same barn with them, and then only with women. They never had enough to eat in the early days, though food was better later, and many of these girls fell ill from hunger, and their brothers, who were also taken, suffered more. Unspeakable things happened, and there is no forgiveness in the hearts of those who suffered them.

That was the first exodus from Lille, and the second happened twelve days later when 12,000 men and boys were sent away farther into the German lines, so that their labour should not be given us. "I wept when my poor boy

was taken," said a lady this morning. "He was only fourteen, and such a child in his heart." They were laden with heavy packs, and kept in the citadel for two nights before leaving, with little food, and when they were assembled their sisters and mothers walked with them as far as allowed, weeping and crying, and boys and men tried in vain to hide their own tears, and it was a breaking of hearts. More than two years ago a German Commission visited Lille, and all the machinery was removed from the great textile factories which made the wealth of the city, with that of Roubaix and Tourcoing.

Millions of pounds' worth of machinery were taken, and what could not be taken was smashed. It was a deliberate plan to kill the industry of northern France.

A thousand times to-day I heard the words: "Monsieur, they are robbers. They stole everything we had worth anything to them—our brass, our metal of all kinds, our linen, clocks, draperies. They even took the bells out of our churches, and that is why there are no bells ringing to-day because of our deliverance."

Among the worst cruelties done by the Germans was their treatment of our prisoners. From Mr. Moore, a clergyman, and from the American doctor and from other witnesses I heard dreadful things of our men's sufferings. Most of them were kept in the citadel at Mons-en-Barœul, outside Kity, and from that place drafted to dig trenches. There were about 800 of them there at a time, and it was said by Mr. Moore to be "a Black Hole of Calcutta. They were always half-starved, so that they were almost too weak to walk."

"I looked into young faces," said the clergyman, "and thought, 'I shall be called to bury you in a day or two.'" Frenchwomen smuggled bread to them at great risk of imprisonment, and sometimes old German Landsturm men turned their heads away and encouraged this, in disobedience to orders. The sick and wounded were tended by

Sisters of Charity and French ladies, who waited on them and saw frightful things without flinching, because of their courage. "We owe a big debt to those women," said Mr. Moore, "and England should be grateful to them."

One does not wish, at this stage of the war, to stir up the passion and desire for revenge—God knows there is no need of that—but these things must be written in history, and I write them now, knowing their truth. In this city of Lille I have heard a thousand things of tragedy, even in one day's visit.

"We gave ourselves up for lost," some of the people told me. "It seemed that all our faith and all our patience had been in vain. We cried out to God in despair. But that lasted only a little while. We steeled ourselves again, and said, 'France and England cannot be beaten. We must win in the end.' And your men helped us. Your prisoners were brought through our streets, muddy, exhausted, covered with blood some of them, but they held their heads high, so proudly, oh, so proudly, and some of them said as they passed, 'It's all right. We shall have them yet. We shall come back on them.' Then we said, 'If those boys speak like that, after all they have suffered, we must not lose heart,' and we were comforted."

Worse even than the treatment of British prisoners was that of the Russians. "Oh, they were treated like dogs," said one girl; and many other people told me so. "They were treated like brute beasts," said another.

Two hundred and forty British soldiers lie buried in Lille, but 3000 Germans lie buried there, too. "Once, when I was burying three of our men," said Mr. Moore, "the German pastor was burying seventy-six of his own soldiers."

The American doctor was friendly with a young German who had an English mother and was a nice fellow, and it was he who brought tidings of strange things about to happen.

It was past midnight on September 31 that the doctor heard a ringing at his door-bell. He went down, frightened—a sudden summons like that was always frightening—and opened the door and saw his friend.

"What are you doing at this hour?" he asked.

The young German was white and haggard. "I must tell you a strange secret," he said in a whisper. "I promised to let you know when to leave in case Lille were abandoned by us and there was risk of bombardment. That time has come. To-night 15,000 men are leaving Lille, and in a little while it will be evacuated."

There were other signs of approaching flight under the pressure of the British troops. All the bridges were mined. German guns were placed on the inner side of the canal and fired to the British lines, which seemed to come nearer every day judging by the roar of the cannonade.

"The English are coming," said the people of Lille, and held their hands to their throats, and could hardly breathe because of their excitement. They were sick and white with hope. And so it happened yesterday, and to-day I went into Lille, but even now many, like those I met, can hardly believe that all this is true. There are no bells ringing for joy in Lille, because the belfries have been robbed, but every human being in that city, or almost every one—for perhaps there are some poor creatures too beaten by life's ironies even for the joy of deliverance—is warmed by the fire of spiritual gladness, so that in a few hours they have been repaid for all their cold days when they sat in Lille without coal and very little food, and hope that had worn rather thin, and for the tears they have shed and the patience with which they stifled their impatience, burning like a fever in them. Lille is a city of splendid thanksgiving, and the name of England is spoken on the lips of its people and of its children as a magic word to which they owe their rescue. In Lille it is good to be an Englishman and to wear a coat of khaki.

V

Ostend and the Coast

October 21

At Ostend there are 25,000 out of 45,000 people still living in the town, and all of them were massed on the sea-front when Sir Roger Keyes landed from his flagship, and when he went on shore in a motor launch, which put off from a destroyer, with the King and Queen of the Belgians, who were greeted with overwhelming enthusiasm.

The last Germans left Ostend at nine o'clock last Thursday morning, but they still had machine-guns on the outskirts, by the gas factory, and the port was still within range of the German guns when the King and Queen landed and went through the streets, so closely pressed by cheering crowds eager to touch them and to kiss their hands that they could hardly move.

Our gallant old *Vindictive* lies aslant across the Mole, and the enemy before leaving sank three more vessels, including a mail steamer and dredger, in order to block up the fairway, but there is still room for small craft to pass. The town is but little damaged, and hotels like the Continental, Savoy, and Phare, and the great Kursaal, so familiar to British tourists before the war, are still standing.

All the harbour works, like the Estacade or Mole and the sea-front, have been elaborately organized for defensive purposes. The Mole itself is one vast series of dug-outs, communication trenches, and tunnels, and there are concrete block-houses all the way between the Kursaal and Hôtel du Phare, and concrete shelters and defences were made right through the Hôtel Continental.

The Germans had a sudden panic that we intended a landing with Tanks from flat-bottom barges during the Battle of Flanders—an idea that was perhaps not altogether wide of the mark—and they prepared very late in

the day an astounding system of anti-Tank defences to frustrate this possibility. Then a few weeks ago the German forces at Ostend saw themselves threatened by the menace of our advance, and prepared in desperate haste for flight. Their real panic began on October 1, when they began an orgy of destruction and the removal of their own works, upon which they had spent years of labour at enormous cost, for the purpose of their submarine warfare.

Ostend was the main submarine base, and they built enormous workshops and sheds in basins and docks for accommodation and repairing of these undersea craft. They had thousands of men engaged there, masses of machinery and plant, and it was in those works that all their hopes lay of reducing the British Empire to impotence by ruthless submarine activity.

Our Royal Naval Air Service, as it was then before amalgamation in our Royal Air Force, did a great deal to smash these ambitions by ceaseless bombing. As I have written more than once in months past, the pilots and crews of our big Handley Page machines never left Ostend alone, and poured bombs over the submarine workshops night after night, doing enormous damage, so that, as I could see by aerial photographs, many basins were abandoned, many great sheds destroyed and submarines refitting or repairing had to creep farther back into other basins, which in turn were attacked. By day ordinary aircraft took up the work of the night raiders, and dropped smaller bombs and kept the German engineers in a state of terror. But for all that there was still a mass of valuable machinery in these works, and on October 1 gangs of German marines were employed to remove it, and to destroy what they could not get away. For two days this activity went on, while large numbers of troops were evacuated from the town and only rear-guards left. It is evident that the Germans expected our arrival at any hour, but when a few days passed without this happening the labour parties returned to carry out more material, and, as I have said, the last parties did not

leave until Thursday morning, while the town was still kept within the range of their guns.

For a long time during this war Ostend was a favourite rest for German troops, and many battalions who had done good service in the fighting-lines were sent there in batches for special leave. German officers especially made this their haunt of gaiety, and there were daily concerts in the Kursaal, where many of the best musicians of Germany performed, and where, as in time of peace, there were women selling programmes and flowers and refreshments. That gaiety was restricted when our bombing became too severe, and in recent days Ostend was a gloomy place, in which German officers talked dismally of their military failure, and feared their doom.

Now by the Belgian capture of Blankenberghe, Zeebrugge, and Knocke, which to-day gives them back all the coast up to the Dutch frontier, the Germans have lost their last chance of naval success, and their dream of gaining the Channel ports of France has been shattered, like many other false dreams which for a little while seemed in touch with reality.

Meanwhile southwards on the British Front our troops continue, not without hard fighting, to hasten the enemy retreat from big cities long held in bondage. They are now well beyond Tourcoing and Roubaix, those two big manufacturing towns so closely linked up with Lille. They were East Yorks and other troops of the 31st Division who took Tourcoing, and, with the 40th Division, are now pushing out to the villages beyond Mouscron, Dottignies, and Estanpuis, towards the Scheldt, which comes down through Ghent.

Many German soldiers have hidden themselves in the liberated towns, preferring to surrender rather than go on fighting—I saw some of those captured like this in Bruges, and in Ostend there is a German proclamation asking Belgian civilians to denounce the deserters to the Allied troops—and they say that in order to make things easy with

President Wilson it has been decided to avoid the bombardment of towns with large populations, though this does not apply to villages, which are now being shelled by the enemy, so that some civilians have been killed during the last two days.

Life in Roubaix and Tourcoing was as hard as in Lille. There are many rich manufacturers in these towns, and among them a number of Yorkshire and Lancashire business men with great industries, such as a Mr. Richardson who had cotton-mills employing nearly 2000 workpeople, before it was stripped of all its machinery by the enemy. Food could be had by those with money enough to pay for it—£2 10*s.* for a pound of butter, and everything on the same scale—but many poor people, I am told, died of starvation, and there was general misery.

At Lille I was told by distinguished citizens that seven out of every ten men had been in prison at some time or other "for refusing to pay fines, or for other crimes" against German oppression. In Tourcoing it was as bad, and Mr. Richardson, the manufacturer I have mentioned, was actually taken as hostage and imprisoned six weeks in Germany, because, for all fantastic reasons, the French had shelled Alexandretta! For that reason also Roubaix had to pay a fine of £6000.

The following is a translation of a document for the forcible conscription of women in Lille and other towns in Easter week of 1916, which will be remembered against the Germans for ever:

"All the inhabitants of households, with the exception of children under fourteen years and their mothers, and with the exception as well of aged people, must prepare at once for their deportation in an hour and a half. An officer will make the final decision as to which persons shall be conducted to the camp of assembly.

"For this purpose all the inhabitants of households must assemble before their habitation. In case of bad weather

it is permitted to remain in the lobby. The house door must be kept open. All pleas will be useless. No inhabitant of the house—even those who are not to be transported—will be permitted to leave the house before eight in the morning—German time.

"Each person will be entitled to ten kilograms of luggage. If there is an excess of weight, the entire luggage of such person will be refused without any consideration. It is absolutely necessary to provide oneself in one's own interest with utensils for eating and drinking, and also with a woollen blanket, good boots, and linen. Every person must carry his or her identity card. Any one who endeavours to avoid transportation will be ruthlessly punished.—*Etappen Kommandantur.*"

The same tragic scenes as in Lille happened when the Germans made conscription of the women in Tourcoing and Roubaix, with machine-guns posted in the streets and German officers making arbitrary choice of young women and girls for forced labour in the fields far from their homes. This seizing of girls was done at night without previous warning, and the dark horror of it made girls go mad, and their shrieks rang down the streets. And even those who had the most courage wept bitterly, and great wailing arose from mothers and fathers and sisters and children, who feared the worst for those who were taken. Even some of the German officers revolted from this order, and said, "We will not do this filthy work," and some of them then, and more later when despair took hold of them, committed suicide.

It is no wonder that there is no pardon in the hearts of French and Belgian women for other women of their own town who in weakness of character and looseness of heart were beguiled into relationship with Germans. A train-load of these women left some of the towns I have named because they had been seen in intimacy with German officers and men, and yesterday at the entrance to Bruges I

saw a portrait of a woman nailed up, and was told that it was to pillory her name for her unfaithfulness to pride and race. That is one of the worst tragedies of war, inevitable among war's horrors and pitiful. Let us forget these things in the general joy, though they will be remembered while history lasts; but do not let us forget that while many cities are being liberated and are full of gladness our soldiers, to whom this is largely due, are still facing German gun-fire and machine-gun bullets.

VI

To Courtrai and Valenciennes

October 21

Our troops are engaged in heavy fighting on the whole length of our Front, north-east of Courtrai to south-east of Le Cateau, for more than fifty miles, and in spite of the enemy's desperate resistance in order to hold the line of the Scheldt southward from Ghent, covering Tournai and Valenciennes, we are getting close to that canal everywhere, and are beyond it between Denain and Le Cateau.

This morning's advance by our Second and Third Armies threatens the crossings of the canal, and the two historic cities of Tournai and Valenciennes will soon be within our reach.

[2]On October 7 operations had been renewed by the Fourth Army on a front of about ten miles from Le Cateau southwards, with the French First Army attacking west of the Sambre and Oise Canal. The troops engaged on our front included two American Divisions—the 30th and 27th —and our 46th, 1st, 6th, 50th, and 66th Divisions. The enemy was holding the wooded country east of Bohain and the line of the Selle north of it in great strength. For several days our troops had very hard and costly fighting, but succeeded in driving the enemy across the Sambre and Oise at nearly all points south of Catillon.[3]

There was heroic fighting yesterday by English, Scottish, and Welsh divisions for the heights above the River Selle, and our Tank Corps rendered great service to the infantry by getting across to the east flank and destroying many German machine-gun nests, in spite of the flooded ground. The troops engaged were the 38th (Welsh), 17th, 5th, 42nd, 62nd, Guards, and 19th Divisions of the Third Army, and the 4th Division on the right of the First Army.

Our Engineers have been wonderfully gallant in their work of throwing across pontoon bridges under heavy fire, especially under a hail of machine-gun bullets from the high ground on the enemy's side, and by their courage our field-gunners were able to get across close behind the infantry and open fire on hostile positions at close range.

On the Third Army Front by the town of Solesmes, south of Valenciennes, on the German line of resistance, there has been extremely severe fighting, and the enemy has massed artillery behind the Scheldt, with which he has barraged our line of advance fiercely, using large numbers of gas shells in order to soak the woods and villages with poison vapour. The valleys of the Avilly and the Selle have been choked with this gas, and the German machine-gunners have defended their positions stubbornly. Nevertheless our troops broke down this opposition, and have taken many hundreds of prisoners.

The German casaulties have been heavy, and on one part of our Third Army Front 526 German dead were counted last night. The enemy made a strong counter-attack against our Third Army last evening, between five and eight o'clock, debouching from the town of Romeries, but our men shattered it by machine-gun and rifle fire, supported by our field artillery.

East of Courtrai the Second Army resumed its advance this morning, and is pushing forward steadily towards the Scheldt Canal and taking many little Flemish villages still inhabited by civilians crouching in their cellars, while machine-guns sweep their streets and shells plough up their

fields. That is a pitiful side of this fighting, and this morning round Courtrai I passed many groups of Flemish peasants, with their babies and old people, passing our guns, trekking with wheelbarrows from one village to another in search of greater safety, or standing in the fields where our artillery was just getting into action, and where new shell-craters should have warned them away if they had had more knowledge of war.

I went into Courtrai itself this morning. It has now been freed from the enemy. But it was not wholly a joyous entry, like that into Lille or Bruges, or other towns where civilian crowds have greeted any Englishman with cheers and embraces. The people here, 25,000 to 30,000 of them, have suffered too much to have any complete reaction yet. Some of them called out "Good morning," and all their men doffed their hats to us, but with gravity and a kind of dullness, like people who have long been stunned by misery. I could not wonder at that. I was chilled by the sinister spirit of this old city, so beautiful in time of peace with its tall belfry of St.-Martin's Church high above its gabled houses, and Flemish Town Hall and the broad market-place, where six centuries ago English merchants came to buy their cloth from Flemish burghers, and where, after the Battle of Spurs, many knights, with broken armour and tattered plumes, were brought in as prisoners of Flemish craftsmen who had fought against them for their liberties.

Through many centuries of history Courtrai has been a famous town in Flanders, with a rich trade in cloth and wool, and, from the windows of the houses still standing, silken banners were hung to welcome kings like the Fourth Edward of England, or on the feast days of the guilds. I remembered these things to-day when I went into the city across a canal with broken bridges, where two days ago there was bloody fighting, and where to-day new pits were dug by German shells, and when I went into the Grande Place and saw the people standing in their doorways, or hurrying to their vaults to escape from shell-fire, I thought

of these contrasts of history. Fear was still on the faces of men and women, and remembrance of frightful days only one day old.

I have already told how, to the end of last week, our troops were fighting on one side of the canal which cuts off part of the town, while the enemy was strong in the other and larger part beyond the canal, where 25,000 people, or more, were shut up with them. That lasted until Friday night last, with roar of gun-fire from gardens and courtyards and neighbouring fields, and an incessant sweep of machine-gun fire down the streets leading to the canal side. Late on Friday night this fire slackened off, and on Saturday some of our patrols pushed across the river and were met by civilians, who said the Germans were on their way back. Seven of our men went forward alone, and were the first British soldiers to enter the Grande Place, and they took the first welcome of the people, which then was full of enthusiasm and joy for their liberation. They had suffered terrible things, but they thought they were safe now. For several days, while the fighting lasted, they had lived in their cellars—men, women, and children herded together in dark and narrow vaults—waiting there, sleeping there, eating there, until the air became foul. Some people, eager to escape from this confinement, went up into the streets and were killed or wounded. The others stayed below with the cry of shells overhead and frightful explosions shaking the earth about them. Then at last that phase passed and the Germans left, and they came up into the fresh air to greet our troops. But a new phase of fear began on Saturday. The enemy was still close about Courtrai with his guns and men, and not respecting the town full of women and children, as he has done Lille and Tourcoing and Bruges, and other towns which he has been forced to deliver, he opened a bombardment on the city. He fired all through Saturday and all yesterday, and when I went in there to-day he had not ceased. I had hardly reached the Grande Place before a big shell arrived, bursting some-

where in the streets with a frightful crash, and this was followed by other high velocities.

The German bombardment has damaged many houses, pierced holes in many walls and roofs, and has scarred the noble old church of St.-Martin, and broken most of its windows. But so far no great ruin has been made, and the town is still standing with these wounds, and I hope the enemy will desist from this useless brutality, which is only harmful to non-combatants, as we have no soldiers in the city, and all our men are beyond it and around it.

Most of the inhabitants speak only Flemish, but I had a conversation with one man who speaks good French. I have heard many passionate things said by people who have undergone four years of oppression under German rule, but never have I seen so much fire of passion as was in this man's eyes, nor heard a voice so vibrant with it. He tried to check his emotion, but at every sentence his voice rose and thrilled, and he made a terrible denunciation of the German race, as he had seen it in Courtrai.

It was the same story as in the other towns of France and Belgium. Courtrai had been robbed of all its copper and of all its wool, down to mattresses off the beds, and the enemy had loaded it with requisitions and fines, and had destroyed all its industrial machinery for cloth-making. They did not take all the machines away. They took hammers and broke them to bits.

And the German officers were arrogant and brutal to people even who received them with courtesy, hiding their hatred and coercing themselves to scrupulous politeness. They robbed houses of their furniture and valuables. They seized the food sent for the citizens by the International Relief Committee. They were abominable with the women.

The last commandant of Courtrai was von Richthoven, father of the famous German aviator, and he was a hard man and kept the city under an iron rule.

"But all that, thank God, is finished now," said my informant. As he spoke a monstrous shell came overhead,

but he took no notice of it and said, "All that is finished; we are safe from the enemy's evil ways at last." I confess I was not so sure of it, hearing those beastly crashes in Courtrai.

I found one old English lady in the city, or rather, an Irish lady, named Miss Mary Cunningham. She is an old lady of over seventy, who has lived in Courtrai for twelve years, at first in well-to-do circumstances, her father being a flax-spinner, but afterwards obliged to earn her living by teaching French and English to Flemish pupils. Even that failed her after the war, because, as it dragged on, English and French did not seem much good to people surrounded by Germans. So Miss Cunningham is poor now, and lives in a tiny house opposite the cathedral, with a cooking-stove in her parlour, and not much to cook on it, poor soul. But she received us as a great lady of the old school with most beautiful dignity, undisturbed by "noises without," omnious crashes close at hand, and sounds of breaking glass. She made only one remark, showing that she noticed these things. "Do you mind shutting the door, my dear? I don't like those bombs coming in." I noticed that "bombs," as she called German shells, had already broken the front part of her little parlour, and she was very close to the danger-point of hostile shell-fire ranged by the belfry of Courtrai. She did not say much about the war, except when she spoke of the Germans as highway robbers; but her mind went back to Ireland and old friends there, and her old people. Her grandmother was a Miss Kimmins, the sister of President Wilson's great-grandmother. She told us that as a passing thought, but I was startled by her words and thought how queer it was that I should be sitting with President Wilson's cousin in a little front parlour of Courtrai, with Germans not far away and the city under shell-fire. I do not know President Wilson, but I should be glad if he could hear this old lady, so brave, so gracious in her poverty and danger, with such gallant spirit. Courtrai was sinister to-day, and I hated the sight of women

and children there still in grave danger. They were going to their cellars again as I left, and streets were nearly empty, and not a soul passed through the public gardens where trees have shed many of their leaves, so that the ground is carpeted with red foliage. It has an old-world beauty this city, and, perhaps, in a day or two it will be beyond the range of hostile guns, so that there will be a spirit of peace there again.

Our men are thrusting the enemy farther away and other cities are awaiting liberation with such pent-up emotion as we found in Lille.

OCTOBER 22

OUR troops, fighting in foul weather and over boggy ground, are along the line of the Scheldt Canal in front of Tournai and Valenciennes, and farther north also hold the west bank of the canal for some distance between Tournai and Courtrai.

From the village of Poedrisch, on the Scheldt, where the 41st Division is engaged, our line bends back westwards along another canal known as the Bossuyt-Courtrai Canal, which the enemy has defended strongly with barbed wire, and is holding in strength with machine-guns.

We have now reached a stage when the Germans will undoubtedly make a stand in order to delay our pursuit, and there will be hard fighting for our men before we can hope to liberate Tournai and Valenciennes, and drive farther east. The enemy has his guns behind the Scheldt, and in this way has for the time being some advantage over us, as the bringing up of our heavies is very difficult over the old battlefields, now in the filthiest conditions of mud and swamps. The Germans have also organized the trench-mortar defence of the Scheldt, and are firing heavy barrages along the opposite banks to prevent our men from gaining the bridgeheads. In spite of this our men, in the most gallant and stubborn way, have closed in upon the Scheldt river and canal except where, on our Second Army

Front, east of Courtrai, they have been checked by the Bossuyt Canal.

Yesterday, north of Courtrai, troops of one corps of the Second Army captured twenty guns, with their limbers and ammunition, and one long-range naval gun. They also captured two railway trains of one metre gauge.

Courtrai is still under fire from high-velocity guns, but they are not doing much damage, and the civilians are happier than when I saw them yesterday. There is considerable shelling against our troops east of the city and in the villages near it.

On our Fifth Army Front north and south of Tournai some of our patrols crossed the Scheldt yesterday at Obigies, above that city, and at Chin, south of it, but after their reconnaissance came back to the west side. The enemy has been fighting hard at the village of Froyennes, north of Tournai, which still remains in his hands, and at St.-Maur, on the south side, which our men have now captured.

Among the places which have fallen into our hands in this advance are the German headquarters formerly used by General Sixt von Armin, our antagonist in the battles of the Somme, whose report, with its frank criticism of German methods and necessities, revealed for the first time the growing weakness of the enemy's fighting machine. The German general and his staff seem to have found war a thirsty business, for they ordered and received consignments of wine to the amount of 10,000 bottles, now lying empty around these buildings.

North of Valencinnes, where the Scarpe runs into the Scheldt, we have captured the town of St.-Amand, and there has been hard fighting in the forest of Vicogne, near by. All this district was crowded with civilians who have now been liberated, and the First Army, which does not include in its boundaries any big manufacturing towns like Lille or Roubaix, has rescued 70,000 people from German rule.

The enemy's resistance is increasing along this line, and

there has been heavy fighting in the village of Thiant (four and a half miles south-west of Valenciennes), where the Germans counter-attacked under a violent bombardment and forced our troops back to the western side of it.

Prisoners still crowd back behind our lines, and the enemy's strength in man-power has been much weakened since October 1, apart from his severe losses in dead and wounded.

The Fourth Army, on the southern part of our Front, south-east of Cambrai, has taken 18,000 prisoners between October 1 and 20. The Third Army, in the same time, has taken 10,000 men and 250 officers. The First Army has taken 3500, and our Second and Fifth Armies have also piled up this score by many thousands.

After all that has happened, the German army cannot afford this drain upon its strength, and for that reason alone must continue to retire, in spite of fierce and resolute rear-guard battles.

The year is waning and the weather is breaking. To-day was truly foul in its aspect around Courtrai, with a heavy drizzle for hours putting a wet blanket of mist over the fields and blotting out all view of villages and towns in this country of the lowlands. Our men slogged through water pools, trudged down rutty roads with mud splashing them to the neck, while lorries surged along broken tracks, swung round shell-craters and skirted deep ditches, and gun-teams, with all their horses plastered to the ears with mud, travelled through the fog to take up new gun positions beyond our newly captured towns. All this makes war difficult and slow, and what is most amazing is the speed with which our armies are following up the German retreat, like a world on the move, with aerodromes and hospitals, telegraphs and transport, headquarter staffs and labour companies—all the vast population and mechanism which make up modern armies—across battlefields like the craters of the moon to country forty miles from their old bases.

It is a wonderful achievement, due to the industry and effort of every single man, from corps commanders to road-menders working in the mud.

One never hears any order given to hurry up or make haste. "Carry on, there," is the usual phrase of an officer, with rain dripping down his neck as he stands by a German pill-box with a watchful eye on his labour party, but the men do whatever job is theirs with a quiet industry which helps the Army on, and the man with the shovel as well as the man with the rifle is doing his level best to get a move on. And that is the way we are moving, and more cities are slipping into our hands and the enemy is being hustled faster than he wants to go, and cannot stop the weight of things bearing down on him with relentless and dreadful pressure.

October 23

Our men are now in outlying streets of Valenciennes, divided from the heart of the city by the Scheldt Canal, which is the west boundary of the boulevards. They have outposts in the parish of St.-Vast, and at La Sentinelle, so that they are able to look down avenues of that old town, where many thousands of people are waiting for deliverance, knowing that the English are at their gates. There was not much fighting there this morning, except by bursts of machine-gun fire, but south of Valenciennes to the villages and woods below Le Cateau on a front of nearly twenty miles there was a drive forward by our Third and Fourth Armies towards the great forest of Mormal, covering many hundreds of acres of dense woodlands, where its foliage is now turned to scarlet and gold, like the leaves of all the trees in this new battle-ground beyond the belt, forty miles deep for hundreds of miles, where autumn makes no difference to the landscape, because all is dead. Here beyond our liberated towns of Cambrai, Douai, and Lille there are many woods and many streams and many small ridges, and fields cut up by ditches and hedges, so that

it is not easy country through which to fight. The enemy has plenty of cover for his men and guns. In the woods especially, German machine-gunners can lie in ambush and fire until our men are close to them before stealing away down glades and hiding behind other trees. So our men have to go warily, and rather than penetrate those dense woods thick in undergrowth, work round them, dodging machine-gun fire and surrounding German rear-guards. Near Valenciennes the enemy is filtering out of the big forest of Raismes, and our men were able to bite off one-half of it, called the Forêt de Vicogne, and to advance round the rest of it without much resistance or risk. The First Army has taken 1300 prisoners to-day by surrounding these woods. To-day the enemy has fought hard to hold other woods which at one time formed part of the huge forest of Mormal, when French kings used to go boar-hunting, but now are isolated copses like Bishop's Wood below Le Cateau.

On our Third Army Front this morning our troops advanced on a line of 12,000 yards between Le Cateau and Valenciennes to a depth of several miles, in which there are many scattered villages among the woodlands, like Vertain and Romeries and Beaurain. The Divisions engaged from north to south were the 19th, 2nd, 3rd, New Zealand, 37th, 42nd, 5th, 21st, and 33rd. On the second day the 61st, 4th, and 51st Divisions extended the line of attack for a further five miles northward. Several hamlets were captured in spite of machine-gun fire defending them with a girdle of bullets, and there was trouble at Vendegie-au-Bois, because the Germans had many of these weapons concealed behind closely growing trees, and high in their branches among their tattered foliage. At an early hour this morning the men of our 3rd Division had taken 800 prisoners around St.-Martin and Vertain, and among the prisoners taken by these and other men of our Third Army this morning eight German divisions have been identified—units from battered and mangled German divi-

sions who have been fighting for a long time without relief, bearing the brunt of these rear-guard actions, behind which the enemy is getting back his guns and his material of war. On the Fourth Army Front farther south—below Le Cateau—our troops of the 18th, 25th, 6th, and 1st Divisions had the help of a small number of Tanks, which had difficult country to cross owing to the number of small streams and tree-trunk barricades. But they seem to have overcome these obstacles and have been reported over the widest stream, making their way to the woods, where the German machine-gunners lie in ambush.

The morning started with a thick white fog, so wet and dense that when I went through Douai there was no visibility whatever for our aeroplanes, however low they flew, and they were flying just above the tree-tops. It was, I think, in favour of our troops, for it blinded the German machine-gunners searching for any movement of men. Apart from fog, it was pitch dark when our men started, as their attack began at half-past two in some places, and earlier in others. It had been a bad night. The enemy, anticipating further action to-day, fired a large number of gas-shells, and tried to break up the assembling of our troops by a heavy barrage from field-guns. Later in the morning the fog lifted, and there was a golden day of autumn for this conflict in the woods of France. Some of our men of the 6th and 25th Divisions worked round Bishop's Wood, and airmen report having seen them through the village of Pommereuil and on the east side of the wood which faces Landrecies, famous in the history of the British retreat down from Mons, because of the fierce fighting in its streets. One village named Bousies was the scene of sharp fighting to-day, and when our men of the 18th Division closed round it numbers of Germans were seen running out of the other side towards the deep shelter of the great forest of Mormal. At the same time fresh reinforcements of German troops debouched from the forest and met the runaways, and there was wild con-

fusion, as some went one way and some another. It is probable that there will be strong counter-attacks against us in this district. Several thousands of prisoners must have been taken to-day in these operations, and by drawing close to the forest of Mormal we are drawing our loop tighter round Valenciennes, so that the enemy will have to withdraw quickly unless he risks still longer the capture of its garrison.

I am afraid there must be many poor peasants trapped along this line of battle, woodcutters crouching in undergrowth through which machine-gun bullets are slashing, and wives of French charcoal-burners, hiding with their babes in the cellars of little farmsteads. This has happened on the line of our advance beyond the big towns, and it is a tragedy which stirs the hearts of our men, who go slogging forward day and night, far from our main lines of communication, into this great unknown country, which they call "The Blue." They give some of their bully-beef to these women and children, though they are ravenously hungry after cold nights and exhausting days, and they break off hunks of bread and thrust them into the hands of boys and girls whose pinched faces tell their tale, though they do not beg. Lamentable things are happening in some of these places, as at St.-Amand, near Valenciennes, which was captured by our cavalry. Into this village the enemy collected nearly 1500 people who are suffering from what is called Spanish influenza. He turned one building into a hospital for them, and crowded it. Then, when he left the village to escape the cavalry which closed round it, he shelled it with mustard gas. Most of his shells fell around the hospital, though his gunners ought to have known and had pity, and these poor, stricken souls who went hiding in their cellars, so ill already that many could not stand, and some were dying, and are now dead, were aware of poisonous vapour stealing into their lungs and burning them. That has just happened, and our men are now getting these people away in ambulances as fast as they can

be brought up, and this morning I saw many hospital nurses on their way up to look after these gas patients, taking the same risk with brave hearts.

The problem of the civilian populations liberated by our advancing armies is serious, and is adding to the burden of our fighting organization. One corps of ours east of Douai has 42,000 people on its hands, all destitute, utterly without means of getting food, in grave peril of starvation, unless we send supplies without delay. It is not easy to send up supplies for people numbering many divisions of troops. Our transport difficulties over the old battlefields are already hard enough in supplying our own men, so that they may not go hungry in the front line. Add to that these thousands of starving souls, and it may be imagined that our "Q" branch is in a desperate dilemma. But those are the dilemmas that bring out the best in our race, and our administrative officers are giving themselves no rest in order to organize quick relief, and thousands of rations are being brought up by men who drive all night without taking their share of sleep, by ambulance drivers, who volunteer for overtime after long hours of labour at the casualty clearing-stations, so that these French women and children and these poor old helpless people may not starve to death. There is heroic work to cure the tragedy of St.-Amand, east of Douai, below Valenciennes. In Douai itself there is a tragedy, but of another kind, without a human touch. For Douai is dead. In this home of old scholars and of many centuries of splendid history and good craftsmanship, there is no life except that of a stray cat or two, like one I saw affrighted by my footsteps to-day in the lonely halls of the Hôtel de Ville, where upstairs and downstairs there was an utter loneliness and great silence amidst the litter of its archives flung about by German hands in search of loot. Where are the people of Douai? No single face looked out from the windows of its old houses to-day. Its cathedral was a house of silence, strewn with gold-worked vestments and altar vessels, and heaps of

pipes torn from its great organ. I went into gardens neatly tended, with autumn flowers in bloom, and no gardener was there among the shrubs. I went into houses where there was food in the dishes, but no one to eat it, and into shops where the cupboards were open and bare, and all the furniture was overturned, and crockery and glass were smashed by deliberate industry. It was a noble old city, and its gables and old carvings and sixteenth-century frontages would tempt an artist's hands, and everywhere a man with a knowledge of history finds the spirit of old France calling to him with the voices of its saints and scholars and princes and burghers and fair women famous in the pages of France. But it is a city of ghosts, and no human being is there, and I and two other men to-day were alone in it, and its solitude scared us so that we were glad to leave.

October 24

At least 6000 prisoners were brought behind our lines yesterday as the result of the battle south of Valenciennes, and our troops captured many field-guns and some howitzers. I described the character of this battle yesterday among woodlands and across streams and through country divided by hedges and ditches like our English Home Counties. Those woods are all flushed by autumn tints, but our men were not observing the beauties of nature. The German gun-fire was strong, as in addition to his forward batteries the enemy has many long-range guns across the Scheldt, and they were ready for a new attack, so that they sent down a barrage of high explosives and gas-shells before dawn in order to break up our assembling troops. Afterwards our men had to face wicked machine-gun fire from woods and villages, and from the other side of the Harpies river, where they had to make bridges before crossing. The Commander-in-Chief yesterday named some of our divisions engaged, and we out here know more than people at home what their numbers mean. They are

the same divisions who since August 8 have been fighting their way forward over the old battlefields and then into new country in a steady progress that reveals an astounding human endurance. The 5th Division, which yesterday stormed the village of Beaurain, strongly fortified and stubbornly defended, were with the New Zealanders in all the hard fighting for Bapaume, and these men of Devon, Kent, and Cornwall have gone forward to new battles on many mornings during the last three months as a matter of habit as they take their breakfast. The New Zealanders themselves, who with some of our English battalions captured Neuvilly yesterday and fought their way to the high ground on the north side of the village, have gone a long way since I met them at Hebuterne in the beginning of August —a good forty miles away—and most of the way, with only a short respite, they have walked through the tattoo of hostile machine-gun fire, and have seldom passed a village without having to fight for its ruins.

The 33rd Division, with the 19th and 61st Divisions, and with the 21st Division alongside them, crossed the Harpies stream yesterday and took Vendegies and cleared its wood of a hornets' nest of machine-gunners. Both of these divisions have been through hard months—the 21st and its Yorkshire and Northumberland men fighting all the way back on our retreat and all the way forward on our advance, and the 33rd did brave work at Meteren, near Bailleul, when we were hardest pressed in April of this year, and much gallant service since. So it has been with the 25th Division, hammered and rehammered in the fires of war since March 21, and with the 18th Division and their Home County battalions. Yesterday it was the 25th who fought through Bishop's Wood, and the 18th who carved their way through the enemy for three and a half miles and then stormed and captured Bousies. Farther north the 2nd and 3rd Divisions took Escarmains, those two stubborn divisions who helped to save England on the days when the German army was very strong against us—the

2nd at Bourlon Wood last year, and the 3rd at Arras this year and in other places since.

I have written so often during the four years of the war about the glorious old 3rd Division that they should be known to the world when they come marching home, and the 2nd Division—Royal Fusiliers, Scotsmen, and English county troops—have a marvellous record in this war. Well, there they all are out there, among the woodlands south of Valenciennes, and fighting on to-day as they did yesterday, tired because of their progress, covered in mud because they have gone through swampy streams, cold at night because there is a wet white mist until long after dawn, and hungry pretty often, I guess, before the rations come up, but still eager to keep moving and to get the Germans on the run again. Their advance yesterday makes Valenciennes more unsafe for the Germans, and brings hope nearer to the civilians there, listening to the noise of gunfire very close, and longing for the hour which will open their gates across the Scheldt to the first patrols of the men in khaki when the grey coats shall have gone for ever. As I told yesterday, we have outposts in the suburbs of Valenciennes, but the Scheldt still bars their way to the heart of the city, and the Germans have posted machine-guns in many houses to sweep the bridges, so that it will not be easy to get in. But all this hard fighting by the enemy on our Second, Fifth, First, Third, and Fourth Army Fronts is only to gain time. He knows he cannot hold either Valenciennes or Tournai, and his present purpose is to delay our advance until long enough to allow him an orderly retreat. Several times we have got ahead of his time-table by twenty-four hours, to his heavy cost in men and material, and he is struggling to get this time back again for the sake of his transport struggling back along the roads, and to safeguard his packing up of ammunition dumps, aerodromes, hospitals, camps, and stores. So his High Command order the German rear-guards to fight until they are dead or captured in places where they must keep the doors

shut until the great escape is made. The German machine-gunners are obeying this order to the letter with fierce courage, and our men have brave soldiers against them. Troops of our Second Army, who had established posts on the Scheldt east of Roubaix, were heavily shelled this morning, and under cover of this barrage the enemy attacked and drove back one of these outposts. Again, when our men under heavy fire threw two footbridges across the river near Heichin and sent patrols across, the German fire became so intense that their position could not be maintained.

On our Fifth Army Front there was a lot of harassing fire last night by howitzers and field-guns, and on the bridgeheads of the Scheldt near Tournai, where the enemy is holding out strongly, there was a constant sweep of machine-gun fire. The Germans have wired their positions in front of Tournai with two thick belts, and many cellars have been organized as machine-gun emplacements. In this neighbourhood there has been fierce local fighting, with attacks and counter-attacks, and one small wood has changed hands three times, and is again held by the enemy. At Froidmont, near Tournai, some of our troops, advancing quickly, captured a column of transport, including forty-four gun-limbers and forty-six wagons. South of Valenciennes some of our men, who attacked again this morning at four o'clock, succeeded in crossing the stream which barred their way, but met with strong resistance in the villages of Monchaux and Verchain. All this is in pursuance of the German plan to gain time for their retreat, which is inevitable, in spite of strong rear-guard action.

One reason for its inevitability is to be seen in our old Lys salient, which is now abandoned. It was here that the enemy made his drive in April last, and now that the ground is in our hands again we have been able to estimate the cost to him of that enormous effort. One part of the cost is to be found in the German graveyards. Fourteen thousand German dead lie in those cemeteries. Reckoning in the usual way that five men are wounded to each man

killed, and counting in the prisoners we took in this district, it works out that the enemy casualties were 120,000 between April 9 and August 15, when he had to abandon his offensive plans. In addition to that sum of death there is to be reckoned the losses to his military machine in ammunition and material of war and labour. Enormous quantities of ammunition were destroyed by our guns and abandoned by him. Many months of work on light railways, roads, gun emplacements, hospitals, and camps were lost by the failure to carry out his purpose, and this ground about the Lys is not only a graveyard of German manhood, but of the hopes of the German High Command—the wreckage of terrible plans, which were brought to nothing by miscalculations in other parts of the problem, making all their sum go wrong.

October 25

The troops of our First and Third Armies are still fighting very hard in the woody country south of Valenciennes and east of Le Cateau. The Germans are resisting strongly, and no single village has fallen into our men's hands without a separate little battle for it, though during the last twenty-four hours they have taken many villages, and each small river, like the Harpies and the Ecaillon, tributaries of the Scheldt, has been crossed in the face of heavy fire defending the bridgeheads and breaking up bridges flung over by our Engineers. The enemy has many guns and machine-guns everywhere, and our men, moving forward in this open warfare, without any protection of trenches or dug-outs, on the outskirts of woods where the Germans have good cover, and in villages where they fire from the roofs and windows and cellars, are not having an easy drive through. It is close, nagging fighting, and the enemy is showing a dogged spirit. But for all that he is losing ground, and men and guns; his losses in casualties are high, and he cannot withstand the forward movement of our men, who are taking his villages, encircling his woods,

and crossing his streams by grim and gallant persistence.

On the right, the 6th Division is beyond the eastern edge of the Bois de l'Evêque—Bishop's Wood—and beyond the village of Ors; south of Landrecies, and in the centre, other English troops of the 18th and 25th Divisions are getting very close to Le Quesnoy, which is south of Valenciennes. On the left, English and Scottish troops stormed the village of Thiant, after forcing the crossings of the Ecaillon river; and our 4th Division took the villages of Verchain and Monchaux; while the 61st Highland Division cleared the river-bank to Maing under fierce machine-gun fire. The New Zealanders, attacking forward on high ground beyond Neuvilly, captured many German guns and inflicted severe losses on the enemy.

It is extremely difficult to get details of these operations to-day, as the news that comes back from our men is chiefly by aeroplane observers flying low and watching their movements among the woods and villages. There is intense machine-gun fire from high ground east of Le Quesnoy, and hostile field-guns are firing from concealed positions and using quantities of gas-shells. Our airmen see much activity of troops and transport in the German lines, and it is possible that the enemy is preparing for further retreat to escape from the pressure of all these attacks, but meanwhile he is maintaining a strong rear-guard screen of picked troops and sending up new battalions to fill up the gaps caused by our captures and our fire.

October 27

Since Friday morning there has been continuous fighting north and south of Valenciennes, which is now closely invested by our troops of the First Army. In these operations over 10,000 prisoners and many guns have fallen into our hands, and the First, Third, and Fourth Armies have captured many small towns and villages between Le Quesnoy and Valenciennes. This morning, by a further advance the troops of the First Army, after hard fighting round a

place called Caumont Farm, captured the village of Artres, across the Ecaillon river, and established a bridgehead over another stream east of the village. They pushed on north of Artres, securing positions on high ground, where they took fifty more prisoners, and thereby outflanked bodies of German troops lining the road, with strong defences, so that they were compelled to retreat hurriedly to Mareschies, dropping their machine-guns and flinging away their kit. Other men of ours surrounded and took the village of Famars, north of Artres, and a hillock called Mont Houy, and are moving forward to seize the crossings of the little River Rhonelle, eastwards.

These movements bring our men close to the southern edge of Valenciennes, on the east side of the Scheldt, and make the German occupation of that city impossible, if we are able to hold this ground. It is evident that the enemy is being hustled in advance of his time-table of retreat, and under orders from his High Command German troops are making fierce counter-attacks in order to hold us back as long as possible. After a violent bombardment yesterday evening with field batteries and heavy trench-mortars, a strong counter-attack was launched upon our Third Army Front on the line of the railway north of Le Quesnoy, but in spite of powerful forces and most determined courage this attempt was repulsed with severe losses to the enemy, their ranks being mown down by rifle and machine-gun fire. After this failure the enemy withdrew, leaving many dead in front of our positions and carrying away his wounded, and during the night his guns continued to bombard our lines and the villages of Salesches farther back. This afternoon another counter-attack was delivered against our troops of the First Army, with the object of retaking the ground which we captured this morning, and to beat our men back from the bridgeheads of the Rhonelle river. Some of our advanced posts were driven in, but our men still hold their general line of advance secured this morning. The investment of Valenciennes has been made closer

by one body of troops crossing the Scheldt at the village of Trith, east of Denain, in spite of the enemy's violent opposition with machine-gun fire.

While this fighting was in progress a remarkable scene was taking place in Denain, which was recently captured by the 4th Division of Canadians after a severe resistance by the enemy outside and in its streets. Many hundreds of people were in the town during this battle, living down in their cellars while shell-fire passed over their house-tops. When the town was captured the people gave them coffee, but they could not stay and went on after the Germans, driving them to the outskirts of Valenciennes. But to-day these very men came back for awhile to take part in a thanksgiving ceremony by the people of Denain, of which they were the heroes. It was a touching episode in this war, and some of our soldiers had wet eyes now and then. Denain is not a pretty town. It is in the coal-mining region of France, and is like most coal-mining villages in the world, with rows of red-brick cottages beyond slag-heaps and factory chimneys, leading up to a big church which is the centre of the life and spirituality of the town, though ugly also and with none of the beauty of mediæval architecture, but there was a spiritual beauty here to-day, the gratitude of many hearts redeemed by the courage of men in four years' servitude and horror, and thanksgiving for the mercy that had come to them. Somehow or other the people of Denain, poor though they are and still half-starved, had found, or bought, or made thousands of flags, English flags and French flags, and they had hung them across their streets and from the windows of their houses. Outside the church and down the high-street the Canadian soldiers of the Fourth Division were lined up, and fine, grim fighting men they looked in their steel helmets, like seventeenth-century men-at-arms. Outside the church there was a group of priests in gold-worked vestments glinting in the autumn sun that pierced through the mists, and behind them a row of girls dressed as Alsatian maids, with

coloured frocks, and big silk bows on their heads, and each of them carried a large bouquet of flowers for one of the officers of the Canadian Corps as a tribute to heroes. General Currie, Canadian Corps Commander, and the General Commanding the Fourth Canadian Division came, with their brigadiers and other generals and Staff officers.

And then there came a young English captain, who was received with the Royal salute by the Canadian soldiers. It was the Prince of Wales, and one of the Alsatian girls went to him and put a great bouquet in his arms, and he bowed low and smiled his thanks. Masses of flowers were given to the Canadian officers, and there came up a little procession of old men in black, bearing a banner, which they gave to the general commanding the division as a gift from the town of Denain to the Province of Quebec. They were veterans of the war of 1870, and for a second time they had been delivered from the Germans. The doors of the church were wide open, and officers and old men and women followed the Prince of Wales inside, while the priests in their gold vestments went to the altar and praised God for this deliverance and day of joy. It was in the church round which there had been bloody fighting a few days ago, and in the roof, over the high altar, was a big shell-hole showing what had happened then. Not far away, up by Valenciennes, the enemy was still fighting, and Denain was within range of his gun-fire. But there was no sound of war in the church. There was the music of women's voices singing very sweetly old songs of praise, and at the altar the chanting of priests. The women's voices were so full of emotion and beautiful in their harmony that all the Canadian soldiers in the Church sat very still, and into their eyes, the eyes of men who had seen the worst things of war, its most bloody cruelties, there crept a melted look, and they bowed their heads below that high thrilling melody, which was like running water to wash away the wounds of war.

One of the priests turned to that crowd of soldiers and to

the young Prince among them, and in a loud voice said, "Merci." And then, with an eloquence that was not studied, but from the heart of this man, who had seen the suffering of his people in this town, thanked England for what she had done for France, and acclaimed the valour of the Canadians, who were the rescuers of Denain, and reminded the Prince of Wales that, though in old days England and France had fought with each other because of rival interests and ambitions, yet now when the liberty of civilization was threatened England and France had united and fought side by side. The priest spoke the word "England" with love in his voice, and gave his gratitude to those brave, dogged men of England who through four years of war had given their blood without stint because of their ideals. I cannot translate his words or summarize them, but, as he spoke them in French, they were very moving. Then suddenly, as he ended, there was loud music in the church of Denain, and perhaps it was music never heard before in any church of France. For the band of the Canadians struck up the "Marseillaise," and the notes of that hymn of revolution and liberty which is now the hymn of France, rang out with its strange passion and exultation, and filled the sanctuary. Outside there was another band, and the Canadian Scots, with their drums and fifes, stirred the enthusiasm of the people to a high pitch. There was a march past the Prince of Wales beneath the empty pedestal, where once had been the statue to General Villars, the liberator of France from the Austrians in the seventeenth century. The Germans have taken the statue away, but there was something strangely significant in that procession past its pedestal by the men who had rescued Denain from the German scourge.

October 28

The German gunners and machine-gun rear-guards are obeying the order recently transmitted to them from General Headquarters that they must not allow their fighting spirit to be lowered by the prospects of peace or by politics.

Hindenburg approves of these peace efforts, says this order, but expects the German army to obey him in bad days as in good, and the soldiers are asked to go on fighting bravely, so that even now they may obtain an honourable peace. The German rear-guards are fighting hard and bravely to make a screen behind which there are preparations for a general retreat, and round Tournai and Valenciennes they are holding out stubbornly to gain time.

Yesterday and last night German artillerymen, mostly, I believe, with single guns left from batteries on the move, maintained a heavy barrage-fire on positions and villages along our Second, Third, and Fifth Army Fronts, and there was a German counter-attack on the village of Famars, south of Valenciennes, when their men succeeded in gaining the northern part of that place. Our Gordon Highlanders went forward from the southern streets to drive them out, and after fierce and close fighting with machine-guns and bayonets, when many of the enemy were killed, recaptured their positions. Fierce concentrations of shell-fire on the bridgeheads of the River Rhonelle have made the crossing of that stream difficult and hazardous, but in spite of this fire our Engineers have established bridges at several points. So far it seems that only patrols have crossed east and north of Maresches, as the enemy is still holding this line with many machine-guns. All this is, as I have said, no indication of a German plan to defend his present positions to the last, but is a covering battle for the eastward movement of material and men. But it is a grim defence all the same, and no fun for our men, like those of the heroic 51st Division of Highlanders, who have been in this army of pursuit, following up the enemy and routing him out of his hornets' nest, from which comes a deadly spray of machine-gun bullets.

NOVEMBER 1

VALENCIENNES was closed in by the Canadian troops this morning, after heavy fighting, and the enemy will have to

abandon it within a few hours. It seems almost certain that it will be ours to-night or to-morrow morning, when all the thousands of civilians still living there and waiting with desperate anxiety for our entry will be rescued from these days of terror. For during recent days they must have passed through terrible emotions, crowded down in their cellars, listening to the noise of gun-fire around them, and to the tattoo of machine-guns served by German soldiers in rooms above them. This morning, after many days like this, a tumult of gun-fire louder than anything they had ever heard opened north and south of them, and the battle came close to their streets. When I went up among the Canadians to-day the sound of this shell-fire was terrific, and the Canadian officers tell me that their troops attacked to-day under support of a more powerful concentration of guns than they have ever had on so narrow a front since they have been in France. South of the city our 61st, 49th, and 4th Divisions attacked the enemy across the Rhonelle river, and after a hard struggle captured the villages of Maresches and Preseau, and established themselves on high ground two miles to the east of the river.

Valenciennes itself is not being touched by our fire, under strict orders, but the ground over which the Canadians had to advance this morning was smothered in high explosives. They had in front of them the high ground called Mont Houy, from which they had fallen back two or three days ago under German counter-attacks, and this was still strongly held by machine-gun posts. There were also a number of farms, farmsteads, and cottages, like La Targette and the Chemin Vert, to the left of the village of Aulnoy, just below Valenciennes railway, in which the enemy had organized defences. Over these places our barrage-fire rolled as a devastating tide, wiping them off the map of France, and at the same time our guns fired a number of smoke-shells, which made a dense white fog, obliterating all view of our advancing troops, and putting the Germans in a haze so thick that they could not see three

paces about them. Their machine-gunners could not find their human targets, and were helpless. The German infantry of the 6th Division were as baffled as if blankets had been flung about their heads. One German officer, taken prisoner this morning, with many others, said that his position was so hopeless in this fog that he told his company there was nothing to do but surrender, and led them forward as the Canadians advanced to hand them over. At a small place called La Vessie, at the southern edge of Valenciennes, there was a German field-gun in action, firing at close range through this mist, but the Canadians closed round it and captured it.

The enemy's guns had put down a fierce line of fire before the attack started, or soon afterwards, but their batteries were quickly silenced by the power of our artillery, and after that the Canadians were only faced by machine-gun fire from positions in ruined buildings and in embanked ditches, where Germans held out to the last. The Canadian casualties were not heavy, I am told by their own officers, and they were perfectly successful in reaching their objectives along the railway, which is the southern boundary of Valenciennes.

While that attack was taking place another brigade of Canadians on the west side of the city where the canal forms the boundary line, were pushing outposts across, and establishing themselves on the inner bank. So they hold Valenciennes in a tight grip, as Cambrai was held on the last day in German hands, and the enemy must get out. At midday to-day he made one last effort to check us, and a counter-attack was delivered from the village of Saultain, on the eastern side, but orders were given for the artillery to deal with this, and I have no doubt that it was shattered. The Germans have already lost many men on this southern side of the city, and the Canadians were surprised at the number of German dead lying about the Rhonelle river after the fighting of recent days.

For the survivors it is a hopeless business, for they know

now that they are not only beaten in the field, but in the world. "We have been betrayed," said one of the German officers to-day, "and that is why we have lost the war." He had a list of betrayals, beginning with Italy and going on to Rumania and then to Bulgaria, and now, worst of all from his point of view, Austria. They acknowledge that with Austria out of the war they will find it impossible to fight on alone except in a losing fight to save their pride, so humiliation and despair have entered their souls where once arrogance had a dwelling-place and a sense of victory over all the world.

So it is to-day around Valenciennes, where all the neighbouring country is beautiful in the light of a golden All Souls' Day, with a blue sky over the coloured woods through which the uproar of gun-fire comes, and where in villages very close to the fighting-line women and children liberated from German rule are walking with bouquets of autumn flowers to put on the altars of their churches in memory of the dead to whom they owe their rescue.

Farther north, across the French frontier, towards the town of Audenarde, in Belgium, there is another battle in progress, which began yesterday and is continuing to-day, with Belgian, French, American, and British troops attacking side by side. Our men belong to the 34th, 31st, and 35th Divisions. It is a battle among Flemish villages and farmsteads, where peasants are still living helplessly entangled in the nets of horror, with German machine-gunners firing from their windows, and Allied troops trampling into their courtyards with naked bayonets, and the killing of men in their bedrooms and cellars. Into villages from which the enemy has been lately driven poison gas comes from shell-fire, which is not very loud, but makes a little hiss as each shell bursts and liberates its fumes. We have stopped all use of gas because of these civilians, but the Germans are using it every day, and in the Flemish villages many babies are dead and dying, and our ambulances are carrying away women and girls gasping for breath and

blinded by this foul weapon of war. Our men give these village people gas-masks, taken from German prisoners now safe behind the lines, and teach them how to use them, but it is of no avail, because it needs long training and discipline to keep on gas-masks for any length of time.

Last night, in front of our lines near Audenarde, where Scots and Welsh Fusiliers of the 31st Division were approaching Elseghem, and south of them Lancashire Fusilers and Durhams were close up to the Scheldt Canal at Meersche, the enemy set fire to many houses and farms, and all the sky was lit up by the red glare, so that the German soldiers might see the movements of our men. It added to the terror of the night to women who stood with their children clinging to them, watching this scene of war which had engulfed them. Our advance during these last two days has been steady and successful, and to-day the enemy is retreating in front of our Scottish Rifles and King's Own Scottish Borderers, and other troops of the 35th Division south of Audenarde. With the French to the north of us American troops are fighting, and have done very gallant work through these villages and woods. They have had a hard time, for the artillery in support of them have been unable to fire as effectively as usual owing to the anxiety of our gunners to avoid shelling civilians, so the Americans have had to advance against machine-gun fire with rifles and bayonets. They were fighting hard yesterday in a wood called the Spitalbosch, where the enemy was strongly defended behind three-trunk barricades and wired enclosures, and machine-guns hidden in branches and holes dug beneath the roots of trees. It was like the fighting American troops have had in the Argonne, and very difficult and perilous. But these men have gone forward with fine courage, and have routed the enemy out from many of his lairs in this woodland, and by their good service have helped the progress of the French on their left. All this movement striking for Audenarde and the country north of it breaks through the German line south of Ghent, and

will lead surely enough to the liberation of that Belgian city, which is yearning for the luck of Bruges.

Meanwhile our soldiers, like their French and American comrades, and all the world, believe that the war is reaching its end, and that the last battle will soon be fought, and they wait with splendid hope for the news that peace is theirs, with the victory for which they have struggled and suffered so long.

VII

Fall of Valenciennes

November 1

After fierce fighting by English and Canadian troops the old city of Valenciennes across the Scheldt Canal was entered yesterday morning. At 7.50 A.M. the general commanding the Canadian troops, who encircled the town, sent through an historic message: "I have the honour to report that Valenciennes is completely in our hands." It was a fine achievement, which English troops of the 49th and 4th Divisions share with the Canadians, because these Yorkshire Territorials and Regulars of old county regiments overcame the enemy's desperate counter-attacks on Friday after our advance in the morning through the villages of Aulnoy and Preseau, strongly held by large numbers of German troops, with orders to defend these positions to the death. From the north all advance was made impossible by the opening of the Scheldt sluice gates, which flooded that side of the city, and the enemy's only way of escape was by the south-east, so that here he had concentrated all his available men. They fought with courage and grim obstinacy, but it was unavailing against the Canadians and English, supported by an immense concentration of artillery. Many German dead lie across the little Rhonelle river, and 4000 prisoners were taken by our combined troops. The enemy's counter-attacks were made with the

help of Tanks, but broke down utterly, so that our men captured the Tanks and many more prisoners.

I went into Valenciennes yesterday morning, shortly after its capture, when there was still heavy fighting on its south-east side, so that all our guns were in action as I passed them, with an enormous noise, in the outskirts of the city, and flights of shells passing over its houses, where many civilians were waiting with mingled joy and fear, knowing that they were free again, but afraid of this fury of guns around them. The way to Valenciennes from Douai was full of haunting pictures of war, because Canadian and English troops have fought through many of the villages along these roads, and those places have not escaped unscathed. Their people have fled from those nearest to Valenciennes because of the German gun-fire, which has smashed through their roofs and walls and made wreckage in many houses. Some of them have been sliced in half, so that one looks into rooms where cottage pianos and women's sewing-machines and babies' cradles still stand against the farthest walls amidst broken beams and plaster. Only a few soldiers move among these abandoned villages, and yesterday, on a foul day, with wet mist steaming through their shell-pierced walls, which shook like sounding-boards to the roar of the gun-fire, they smelt of tragedy. Through Oisy and Aubry to La Sentinelle, suburbs of Valenciennes on this side of the Scheldt, there was hardly a living soul about, except odd figures like shadows in the wet fog lurking under the walls—our soldiers, by the shape of their steel hats.

All along the railway from Douai the bridges had been blown up by the enemy, and lay in monstrous wreckage across the lines. Beyond, in this thick veil of mist, black slag mountains, like Egyptian pyramids, loomed vaguely, with factory chimneys faintly pencilled above them, as though this were a war in Lancashire. Some people came dragging a cart piled high with furniture, and I called out to them, "Are you from Valenciennes?" "No, monsieur,"

said the man straining at his ropes, and he named another village close by, looking back in a scared way, as though of some fear that dwelt there. Dead horses, horribly mangled, lay on the roadside. War had passed this way not long ago. It was still very close to Valenciennes, and that city was between two fires. Most of the fire came from our side. Guns were crowded in this wet fog through which their flashes stabbed with sudden gusts of flame. Monsters raised up their snouts and bellowed from muddy fields near by, shaking earth and sky. Field batteries, stark in the open, were hard at work, and as I passed within a few yards of them, their sharp strokes hit my ear-drums like the crack of hammers.

Then we came to the Scheldt Canal, and saw Valenciennes outspread before us on the other side, a long, narrow city, built along the line of the Scheldt so that one sees it from end to end, with its churches and factories and towers high above its crowded roofs. Valenciennes, the old city of lacemakers, famous through a thousand years of history, because of the industry of its people and the noble men and women born within its walls, and the many sieges and captures and conflicts when it became the prize of robber princes and warrior empires. I thought of Sir John Froissart, that very gallant knight and mediæval war correspondent, who was born here five hundred years ago. That gentle chronicler would have been sad at heart to see the peril of his city, and yet not without exultation because of its liberation from the enemy who had held it for four years under an iron scourge.

I went across a pontoon bridge built only a few hours ago by Canadian engineers, and passed into the city. The ruins of its railway station were elaborate ruins. Liverpool Street Station would look like this if it had been smashed into twisted iron and broken glass by storms of high explosives. Our airmen had done most of the damage by constant raids upon this great junction of German traffic, and they had made a complete job of it. Rails were

torn up and sleepers burnt and charred. Their bombs had torn the fronts off the booking-offices and waiting-rooms and made matchwood of the signal-boxes and sheds. For German soldiers detraining here it was a hellish place, but beyond the town was untouched by any raid of ours, and the fire of our flying men had been deadly accurate. I went through this ruin out into the station-square. It was empty of all life, but one human figure was there all alone. It was the dead body of a young German soldier, lying with outstretched arms in a pool of blood. He looked as if he had fallen on his way to our lines, as though in hopes of escape. I went across the solitude of this station-square into the Rue St.-Jacques, and wondered because that was empty, too, and as yet I saw no people of Valenciennes. I looked through the broken windows of shop-fronts and no face looked back at me, but there was loneliness behind the counters. I peered through the window of the Hôtel St.-Jacques, and saw its tables and chairs set as though for dinner, but no one sat at the board. At the corner of one street leading into the Place St.-Jean there was a table and chair, and on the table were many spent cartridges, and the pavement was littered with them. It was a sniper's post of some German soldier who had taken cover behind the corner of the shop-front as the Canadians had come in a few hours ago.

There was still the noise of machine-gun fire somewhere on the right, long bursts of staccato shots, and I had heard from a Canadian colonel that the enemy were still holding out in a machine-gun post in the suburb of Marly. We kept our ears alert for any ping of a close bullet. A German ready for death might take many sure shots from any window or cellar here before paying the price. But where were the people of Valenciennes? The solitude was beginning to be oppressive. This was not like an entry into Lille. There were no manifestations of joy in this liberated city. The fury of that gun-fire overhead had kept the people hidden in their houses. Presently, here and there

I saw some faces peering out and then a door opened and a man and a woman appeared and two thin children. The woman thrust out a skinny hand and grasped mine and began to weep. Then she talked passionately with a strange mingling of rage and grief. "Oh, my God!" she said, "those devils have gone at last. What have they not made us suffer! My husband and I had four little houses—we were innkeepers—and last night they sent us to this part of the town and burnt all of them." She used a queer word in French. "Last night," she said, "they made a devil's *charivari* and set many houses on fire."

Her husband spoke to me over his wife's shoulder. "Sir," he said, "they have stolen everything, broken everything, and have ground us down for four years. They are bandits and brigands." "We are hungry," said a thin girl and a smaller boy by her side with a pinched white face. "We have eaten all our bread, and I am hungry." They had some coffee, and asked me to go inside and drink it with them, but I could not wait. The woman held my wrists tight in her skinny hands and said, "You will come back." Then she wept again and said, "We are grateful to the English soldiers. It is they who have saved us."

Farther on in Valenciennes two ladies passed, well dressed in black. They were hurrying fast, as though afraid of all this gun-fire over their heads, but they turned and smiled and said, "We are full of joy. Bravo, *les Anglais!*" One of them put her hand to her heart in a breathless way, and said, "For four years we have suffered. It would take four years to tell you all we have suffered. *Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!*" Then these two ladies hurried on their way again. They were the last people we met until we went into the Place d'Armes, the great square of Valenciennes, where on one side stands the Hôtel de Ville, magnificent with its long Renaissance front, richly carved, and all around old houses, built many of them in the time of the Spanish occupation of the Netherlands, like those in poor, stricken Arras. I noticed that the frontage of the

Hôtel de Ville had been slightly scarred by shell-fire, and that some of the houses were pierced by shell-holes, though there were none in ruins. A group of men stood in a side street at the end of the Town Hall, and by the first glance at them I saw they belonged to the municipality. They were men in black clothes, and dignitaries of the city. They bowed and shook hands very warmly, and each man wanted to tell the tale of Valenciennes under German rule and of the last days of terror, and they all spoke at once, so that it was difficult to hear, especially as the noise of the gun-fire was increasing in violence. But I made out that one old gentleman had just had the inside of his house wrecked by shells from German guns. He pointed to a little house with pointed gables on the opposite side of the square, and said, "I had a lucky escape." I also heard that the German flag on the Town Hall had been pulled down at ten minutes past ten, and that a young Canadian officer had climbed up and fastened the French tricolour in its place, and after that two French interpreters with the Canadian brigade first to enter had raised the English flag in Valenciennes.

I asked to see the Mayor of the city, and a man who had been standing under cover of the walls said, "I will take you if you will please wait a minute." I had less than a minute to wait before he appeared again in full uniform, and said, "I am the *pompier* of Valenciennes, and there were many fires last night in the city, which are still burning, but we can do nothing, because the Germans have let out all the water from the pipes, and so the cellars are all flooded, and the poor people cannot take refuge from bombardment." I saw this misery in Valenciennes, and waded through water ankle-deep in the streets, and looked down in the cellars through open doors below the houses, and saw that they were deep in water. Some young men came up to me, shaking hands emotionally with tears in their eyes. "We are some of those who escaped," said one of them. "Escaped from what?" I asked, and they pointed to a poster

on the wall. I read it, and saw it was an order for the mobilization of all men between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five, who were to present themselves to the German commandant under severe penalties for refusal, in order to be evacuated through the German lines. This order was dated October 31, and the mobilization was to take place on November 1—the day before our capture of the city. Twenty thousand people had been forcibly expelled on October 3 in the direction of Mons, leaving only 5000, who were employed by the enemy in the municipal services, maintaining the gas and water supplies, washing, and other work. Among that number remaining were many who, after expulsion on October 3, had been allowed to return, as they were too weak to continue the march, and had dropped out, encumbering the line of the German retreat. There were also others who had escaped. Many young men had hidden. One of those standing near me had hidden in a wardrobe for several days, and when the Germans had come and searched the room he had buried himself behind the clothes, trembling lest he should be discovered.

They clamoured for news of the outside world. "What is our line?" they asked. "What towns have we captured?" And when I told them they raised their hats and cheered, for one man was from Laon, and another from Guise, and another from Courtrai, and they had had no news. "For four years," said one young man, "we have had only German lies. To know the truth is like escape from a dark prison." The *pompier* touched me on the arm and said, "Do not let us linger here. They are beginning to shell again, and three civilians were killed an hour or so ago. It would be a pity to die when we are so near peace." He gave a big, hearty laugh, and led me down a narrow passage leading to some building where there was a long vaulted room, furnished with tables and beds. It was the temporary Mairie, and the Mayor and his assistants had been living here for fifteen days, when the battle came close

to them. It was dimly lighted, and there was an international party there, including the French interpreters who had hauled up the British flag, Canadian soldiers, municipal officers of Valenciennes, and one or two English officers.

The Mayor's secretary told me some of the facts of the German occupation. It was similiar history to that of Courtrai, Cambrai, Lille, and other liberated towns. German rule had been hard, and there were continual requisitions, fines, and imprisonments. The fines had increased in severity as Germany became more in need of money, and whereas in the early days private individuals had been fined a hundred marks or so for trivial offences against the German military rules, now in the last days they had to pay as much as two thousand. One man was fined in this way for not putting the prices of his goods in his shop window. The requisitions included all copper and mattresses, and wool and wine, and less than a month ago German soldiers completed the loot of the city by going round to each shop and filling sacks with Valenciennes lace—one sack held 50,000 francs' worth of lace—linen handkerchiefs, and other clothes. This was official robbery. Private looting by soldiers was severely punished, and two soldiers were shot for it. During the last weeks of their occupation one regiment only, the 99th, was allowed in the city, and this was chiefly to prevent pillage, as the troops defending Valenciennes were holding positions outside. But for all that many houses were looted, especially the night before last, when the Germans went wild and did much damage, and valuable pictures were cut from their frames by German officers in search of souvenirs.

The people were poorly fed during these four years, and only those with money could obtain things beyond the barest necessities of life. Butter was 40 francs a kilo (2¼ lb.), coffee 60 francs, sugar 25 francs, chocolate 80 francs. The people were encouraged to work in the market-gardens and grow potatoes, cauliflowers, and so on, and then the

German authorities requisitioned all their produce. The look of the women and children who here and there, braving the uproar of the gun-fire around them, came to their doorways calling out, "Bonjour, monsieur, bonjour, et merci" to any British soldier who passed, showed that they had lived through lean days. There was a gaunt look on the women's faces, and the children had sunken cheeks, though their eyes were wonderfully bright because of the gladness that had come after their fear. I saw many little groups who made something go weak in one to see them. At one window sat an old man surrounded by young women. The window was pushed open as I passed, and the old man held out both hands to mine, and as he clasped them tears ran down his cheeks and he could say nothing, though his lips moved. He was a fine old man, with a little white imperial like one of Napoleon's soldiers of the Old Guard, and a lady whom I took to be his granddaughter, said he was a captain of artillery in the war of 1870, and, going back into the room, brought a portrait of a young soldier, whom I saw was the ghost of this old man in boyhood.

Through that open window in Valenciennes came a flood of gratitude to the English and Canadian troops, very beautiful, and kind words from people liberated after four years of horror, and I went away hoping these people would be safe at last, although the battle was even then being fought very close to them. I returned in the evening, when all the sky was on fire with a sunset which spread out gold and crimson wings above emerald lakes and jewelled isles, so that one was awestruck by this beauty after a dismal day. In the darkness which followed this glory of colour there were bursts of red flame and long vivid flashes rending the black night where from the other side of Valenciennes to this side of Tournai all our guns were at work. I hoped the day would soon come when these lights in the sky would be put out by the order to cease fire all along the Front.

VIII

From Tournai to Mons

November 6

Our very gallant men who have gone so long and so far along the road to victory, which now seems just ahead at the turn of the road—that seems too good to be true, like a mirage which eludes men as they walk—are still pursuing an enemy in retreat. They are well on the other side of the Sambre, to the east of the forest of Mormal, through the villages of Cartignies and Marbaix and Dompierre, and are fighting about Bavai, where last evening heavy counter-attacks were repulsed with grave losses to the Germans. The enemy is retiring behind a screen of rear-guards, who here and there are trying to check our troops by machine-gun fire from villages and woods and railway embankments, but nothing can hide from us the truth that it is a general retirement on a wide front by exhausted men, whose divisions and battalions have been shattered, so that only weak remnants can be gathered for this last show of resistance.

In the north, along our Second Army Front, about Tournai, the line of the Scheldt is still held by machine-gunners beyond the canal and floods, but they are now at the pivot of the salient, which is sharply increasing every day, so that it is only a question of time when they get out of that pocket. Tournai must be ours before long, and then all the enemy's line will have a landslide as far north as Ghent. There, with water in front of them and lines of machine-guns well placed, and a well-hidden rear-guard garrison, it is difficult for the Belgians to enter that fine old city of theirs where thousands of people are awaiting liberation; and even now this could only be done by tragic loss of life. The Belgians would not spare themselves that price if it were worth while, but things are happening beyond the

lines on the Belgian Front, as on ours, which may make more sacrifice unnecessary.

News came to us last night over the wires that Germany was sending plenipotentiaries to ask for terms of armistice from Marshal Foch. And those men were coming over under the white flag, knowing through President Wilson what those terms are, and what surrender they will have to make of all their pride. Last night, when that news came among British officers in touch with headquarters, they drew a sudden breath, and said, "Then to-night is the end. . . . The last battle has been fought. . . . It is too wonderful to believe." I heard those words this morning again—in Valenciennes—among generals and staff officers gathered there in the Place d'Armes. "It must mean the end of the war. . . . Surely it is the end at last. . . . Who would ever have believed it?" And one man standing near me said very gravely, "Thank God!" And another, who was a younger man, laughed with a queer break in his voice, and raised a big bouquet of flowers given to him by the townspeople, and gave a little dance, and said, "Back to peace again, and not too quick for me. . . . Back to life."

In Valenciennes, where on the first day of its liberation I walked through empty streets, past windows from which no face looked out, with a rush of shells overhead, and the tumult of great gun-fire all round, and the rat-tat-tat of machine-gun fire in the streets somewhere on my right, there was to-day a ceremony which seemed a celebration of this spirit of peace which is like a shining light before the eyes of all our soldiers. The men who had saved the city came in with their generals to receive thanks from the representatives of the people. All told, there are only 5000 people left in Valenciennes, for all the rest of its inhabitants were forced to leave by the enemy, who on the very last day, as I have written before, summoned the remaining manhood to depart and would have compelled them to go, if we had not stormed the gates in time to save them. So there were not vast crowds to see the entry and review,

and most of the streets were still empty and many houses deserted beyond the ruins of the railway station flung into fantastic wreckage. But in the spaciousness of the Place d'Armes, in old high-gabled houses on each side of the Hôtel de Ville, with its richly carved frontage, above the wide flight of steps, many of the remaining 5000 were gathered, crowded at windows and balconies, which bore traces of the recent bombardment, and on the roofs of buildings pierced here and there by shells. It was only last Saturday that happened. It was only five days ago—the morning I went in—that bodies of German soldiers were lying in their blood on these cobble-stones, and that one of the priests of Valenciennes burying a child was mortally wounded by the side of that small open grave, and that two other citizens were killed as they ran towards the water-logged cellars, where women and children crouched with the floods rising about them.

But five days had made a difference in Valenciennes, and to-day for these people there it was a time of thanksgiving and pageantry. The colours of many flags splashed down their streets and fluttered above their gables, and their balconies were draped with the Tricolour and the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. Old citizens wore tall hats saved up for this day, and girls had taken their lace from hiding-places where Germans had not found it, and wore it round their necks and wrists for the honour of this day. Old women in black bonnets sat in the centre of window-places and clapped their hands—their wrinkled, hard-working old hands—to every British soldier who passed, and there were thousands who passed. It was glorious to see them march by and to know that perhaps these fighting men, these square-jawed boys of ours who have gone through the fires of war unscathed, may have fought their last battle and gained the final victory. They were troops of our First Army, commanded by General Sir Henry Horne, and were the English divisions—the 49th and 4th—who with the Canadians, first in the entry of the city,

share the honour of the Battle of Valenciennes, which was hard fought by the enemy and ourselves.

The army commander drove in with his corps and divisional generals, among whom was Sir William Currie, commanding the Canadian Corps. The Prince of Wales was with Sir Henry Horne, and took part in the inspection of the troops. Flowers were showered on all these generals, great bouquets which they handed to their aides, who held them with a touch of embarrassment in their English way. Nobody heard a word of the speeches, the tribute of the councillors of Valenciennes to the glory of the British and Canadian troops who had rescued their people from their servitude under a ruthless enemy, nor the answer of Sir Henry Horne, expressing the pride of his soldiers in the rescue of that fair old city and their admiration for the courage of its people. Every word was overwhelmed by cheering. Then the pipers of a Highland division, whose fighting I have helped to record through these years of heroic endurance, played a tune, and the music of those pipes was loud in the square of Valenciennes, and will echo in the hearts of its people through many centuries of history and in old traditions. There was a march-past, and thousands of bayonets shone above the steel helmets of these men, and they were heroes who went by, and they had the tribute of heroes from those they had saved.

November 7

In wet weather and mud and autumn mists our men of the 1st and 32nd Divisions, with the Guards and others, keep trudging after the retreating Germans east of Valenciennes and the forest of Mormal, keeping in touch with their rear-guards, and hastening their abandonment of villages and woods where they have machine-gun screens. It is not a walk-over, for the enemy is still losing prisoners, and we are still losing a few men here and there. As late as yesterday German resistance has stiffened at various places, like Eclaibes and Limont Fontaine, to gain time for an or-

derly retreat. We are within a few thousand yards of Maubeuge, and working towards Mons. It would indeed be an astounding coincidence if the British Army were to end the war where they began it—at Mons, where the "Old Contemptibles" fought their first big fight—and that looks as though it might happen. These small rear-guard actions, with fights for machine-guns, and the stealthy forward movement of advanced screens feeling their way through the forest lands of this country beyond Valenciennes, and hearing by the sudden chatter of machine-guns that the enemy is close ahead of them, make hard work for the men engaged, and are great adventures, with all the risks of death and wounds.

But now for our armies as a whole there is only one all-absorbing interest and thought, and that is to know whether the terms of the armistice have been signed by that party of four men who went over last night into the French lines with a trumpet heralding their approach and a white flag for a safe-conduct. They were late, it seems, and, by wireless, regretted that they had been delayed by the transport on their roads, as one might well imagine, with knowledge of what retreat means in weather like this. They were late, but by this time, one way or another, the fate of Germany must have been settled—for peace terms, however hard they are, are the last ditch of war in front of revolution and anarchy. As far as I know our armies, their hope is for the quick ending of this business, for the saving of needless bloodshed, for the return to normal life, and for all that peace means to men who have fought long and hard in exile from their homes, under the daily menace of death. On the other hand, if these four plenipotentiaries refuse the terms, our men will fight on again, sure that, whatever happens now, the Germans cannot hold them on this front, and are bound to break. The German commanders are anxious to maintain their fighting spirit to the end—not an easy thing to do when many of their divisions are broken to pieces, and when entire regiments con-

sist of a few hundred men or less, as in the case of the 15th Reserve Infantry Regiment, which counted thirty-five men after fighting in Flanders, and then had 500 drafts of returned wounded. Not an easy thing to do with certain knowledge of defeat among all their men, with revolution threatened at home, with thousands of desertions, and a state of almost revolt within the ranks. But the regimental and battalion commanders are still trying to goad their men into resistance, so that the German army may keep up a show before the world to the bitter end. On the last day of last month the following order was issued by the headquarters of the 23rd Reserve Division, and it is interesting in its psychology:

"English prisoners have expressed surprise that the German soldier now offers so little resistance. If this is so, it will be easy to carry the battle at a not far distant date on to German soil and attain a decision. A French officer is of opinion that an incomprehensible, almost diseased indifference has laid hold of the whole German army. . . . I am convinced that this battalion will be driven by these statements, which are a disgrace to us, to show the enemy that in us there still lives the old unbroken German fighting spirit which for four years has defied all the onslaughts on the Western Front."

There is not one British soldier who underrates the courage of the German soldier or his wonderful fighting qualities. Even now, hard pressed as he has been, he is conducting his retreat in a skilful way, preventing his front from being utterly broken, carrying away much of his material, saving many of his guns, while his rear-guard machine-gunners offer a stubborn resistance. But that is not good enough now to save his armies. After four years of slaughter, with enormous losses, and all their hopes of victory gone, the courage of picked and stubborn men is not enough to rally the rank and file, who have a clear vision of their doom, and dread the menace that is creeping closer to them. A frightful hatred is in their hearts for the lead-

ers who have duped them with false promises, and made all their sacrifices vain, and brought the hate of the world upon them. The worst among them are afraid now of their own villainies, and the best among them ashamed and sick of the atrocious things done by official command. They are under the fear of punishment from the gods and from men, and hag-ridden by the thought of the retribution which will be exacted from their race. If the armistice is not signed to-day or to-morrow there may be a momentary rally of men called upon to die in the last ditches with some pride of manhood, but there will be no rally which will last until revolution begins; and the four plenipotentiaries have had that thought behind them on their journey.

NOVEMBER 10

THE spirit of victory is in the air. Our troops are following up the retreating enemy with bands playing, and go singing down the roads with flags on their rifles and on their gun-limbers through villages, from which German rear-guards have gone only an hour or two before, and where French and Flemish people cheer them as they pass with cries of "Vive les Anglais!" It is glorious autumn weather, with a sparkle of gold in the sunlight and a glint of gold on the russet leaves and shining pools along the roads, so that it seems as though Nature rejoices with men because a horror is being lifted from the world by the ending of this war, and is smiling through tears, like old men we meet and women who take our hands telling of their thankfulness. It is Sunday, and in many churches in France and Belgium, and in cathedrals which have escaped destruction by a narrow chance, only scathed a little by battles round their town, the Te Deum is being sung, and people who a week ago crept to a church close in the shadow of the walls, afraid of the noise of gun-fire around them, and who a day or two ago saw the grey wolves of the German army still prowling in their streets, though with a hang-dog look, are now singing their praises to God because of

their deliverance, almost doubting even still that this miracle has happened to them, and that after four years under the hostile yoke they are free. Free to speak their minds, free to display the flags of their nation, free of fines and punishments, and requisitions, and spying, and German police, and German arrogance, free in their souls and hearts after four years of servitude under hostile rule.

So it was in Tournai to-day. For three weeks the people there had lived in their cellars listening to the fury of the gun-fire along the Scheldt Canal and closing in about them. They were afraid of having their old city smashed above their heads and of being buried under its ruins. They were afraid of asphyxiating gas creeping down into their cellars and killing them with its poisoned fumes. The Germans said, "The English will do this to you. You will all be killed before they come." But, in spite of their fear, they would not leave, and prayed for the coming of the English. A month ago more than 10,000 went away from Tournai, but that was behind German bayonets after a roll-call of all able-bodied men, who were forced to go, while their women wept for them. A week ago the roar of the bombardment increased, and never ceased day or night, and people became haggard in their cellars because of this awful noise above them. But they were comforted by the knowledge that this British gun-fire was not directed on Tournai, and said, "The Germans have lied again. We shall not be killed by our friends." Then two nights ago, above the noise of the guns, there were louder noises, stupendous explosions, shaking the very stones of their cellars and their vaulted roofs as by a convulsion in the bowels of the earth. Again and again through the night these explosions happened, and the people of Tournai guessed that the Germans were blowing up the bridges over the Scheldt Canal, and that it was a signal of their retreat. They crept out of their houses on Friday morning, and went down to the canal, dividing one part of the town from the other, where all the houses had had their windows blown

out, and were badly shattered by the blowing up of the bridges. A few German machine-gunners remained hidden in those houses. But presently the last of them came out and went away. One of them turned, and said to a woman of Tournai: "Your friends will soon be here. So much the better, because the war is ended for us. Germany is *kaput*."

The men and women waited, and presently they saw an English soldier make his way across the broken girders of the bridge. He was a tall, gallant-looking fellow, and as he stepped on to the inner side of the canal he drew his revolver, and held it ready, looking about keenly for any enemy. But they were friends who rushed at him, shouting, "English, English," and women flung their arms about his neck, and kissed him, and led him into the town, with seething crowds about him, and one family took him into their house and gave him wine, which they had hidden for this day, and, raising their glasses, said, "Vive les Anglais!" As to-day, another family brought out their wine for me, and touched my glass with all their glasses, and said, "Vive l'Angleterre!" After the first soldier had come there came in a small patrol, while the enemy fired some shells into the town and killed some civilians, and after that other British soldiers and staff officers arrived, and to-day there came marching through long columns of troops, with their guns and field-cookers and transport, and they had a welcome of heroes, and liked it, with the laughter of British soldiers for hero-worship. That was just after the singing of the Te Deum in the cathedral of Tournai, that Romanesque building with four tall towers, raised when Richard Cœur de Lion and the second Henry of England were living. Many people had gathered in its great nave and between its round-headed arches, and in the twilight of those grey old stones going up to the rich colour of the painted windows of a high choir behind the altar, beyond a forest of tall piers and pointed arches, with Gothic sculpture. The scene reminded one of some Dutch painting of the Middle Ages

toned down to a noble solemnity. The Bishop of Tournai was there on his throne, and after High Mass, when the Te Deum was sung, he came down the long nave in procession, with priests and acolytes bearing before him the banner of Belgium. The organ pealed out the National Anthem of "La Brabançonne," and all the people sang it from full hearts, and the bishop, like many of his people, had tears in his eyes. Then cheers rose strangely in this church, whose bells have rung the tocsin for many wars and clashed out for the joy of peace, and women's voices rose shrill above the deeper cheers of the men.

As they poured out of the cathedral doors they joined the crowds assembled in the streets to watch the passing through of British troops, and their cheers rose again, and they clapped each body of men and waved hands to them and ran out to give them flags. Among those who passed were the Black Watch, and the red heckle in their bonnets was like a flower worn for victory. They came swinging through in all their war kit, with heavy packs, long, lean, hardy men, with a warrior look about them and knees as brown as the aprons to their kilts. They came swinging through Tournai to the music of their pipes, heard for the first time by these crowds, into whom it put a new fire of enthusiasm, so that their cheers rose higher. The Jocks grinned and answered cheer for cheer with shrill Highland cries, and it was fine to see them pouring out of the funnel of the narrow streets with old Flemish gables, and I wished a painter had been there to record it in colour and in spirit for all time. English troops followed with their brass bands and flourish of drumsticks, which overjoyed the Tournaisiens so that their eyes danced to this rhythm. They marched through the city to the canal and across the bridge already made by our Engineers, and there was a dense throng along the line of the canal, which until a day or two ago was a place of deadly menace, and English Tommies gave their hands to girls and led them over footbridges upon which German machine-gunners had kept

their weapons trained. It was a scene of peace after war.

There was a different kind of scene yesterday when I went into Maubeuge, and, though it was one of victory close to peace, it smelt of war, and the tragedy of war had not quite lifted. I hardly thought I should get into Maubeuge that day, for in the morning our men were still outside it, and there was no news through when I started that it had been taken. Later on the road I heard that our men had gone in and were in touch with the enemy's rear-guards outside. The name of Maubeuge summoned back bad old memories, and I thought of the French crowd in 1914 who heard of its fall when I was standing with them and spoke its name in a horrified whisper as though, if Maubeuge were lost, all were lost for France. It had been a tragic blow, for 35,000 French soldiers and three of their generals had been captured there. Yesterday it was taken back for France by our Grenadier Guards. On the way through Valenciennes I passed many parties of refugees trekking back to the villages from which they had fled under German shell-fire or gas. They were pushing handcarts laden with chattels and children, and they had a homing look in their eyes. Old ladies in black bonnets trudged after gun-limbers, to which they had harnessed their carts, and young women were riding gaily on lorries and guns with Tommies grinning on either side of them. Many of them, I think, were going back to the town of St.-Amand, through which I passed, with its long high street utterly empty of human life, and not a soul in any shuttered house.

As in Lille, so in Maubeuge, the conscription of women for forced labour away from their homes, when they suffered shocking indignities and privations, is what can be least forgotten or forgiven by these people. They made an arbitrary choice of girls among the peasants and bourgeois, and even selected Mlle. Walrand until she escaped under protest. Then in January they took four notable citizens of Maubeuge as hostages to Russia on account of the French attitude regarding Alsace-Lorraine. They were

among 600 hostages taken from this northern part of France, and they were treated inhumanly. I met one of these gentlemen yesterday in Maubeuge, returned after his six months' exile. "They treated us worse than beasts," he said. "On our arrival in Russia we had to sleep on ice a foot thick without shelter until we were put into barns without straw and without washing facilities or any kind of decency. We protested and said, 'We shall all die,' and the German officer in charge of us said, 'That is what we want. The more of you that die, the better pleased we shall be.'" Some did die—one of the four from Maubeuge—and many became ruined in health for life. It was four years of mental torture in Maubeuge, but towards the end they knew that Germany was breaking up. People there, like others in Tournai, to-day tell me that after the failure of the March offensive, there was every sign of moral and physical downfall in the German army. Discipline became lax or dead, and soldiers refused to salute their officers, and even dared to jeer at them without fear of being punished. German officers were afraid of their men, and had foreknowledge of doom. The whole German war machine became shoddy and worn. Their transport was falling to pieces, their horses were bare-ribbed through starvation, the men were on short rations, and were always hungry. The spirit of despair and of revolt increased among them. When at last their days were numbered in Maubeuge, and the Governor left with his staff, they were gloomy beyond words, and the Governor himself wept because of Germany's downfall. While the main body of the German troops went away in retreat, a rear-guard screen was left outside the town to cover them, and through this our Grenadier Guards broke their way at four o'clock yesterday morning. Small parties of men had to be mopped up later, and I saw a batch of prisoners being brought out as I went in. There were also a few snipers about, and one was still somewhere among the ramparts

when I came away, according to one of our officers, who said he had just been firing.

The enemy was still sending over some harassing shots when dusk crept over Maubeuge, and, as I went away, I hoped they would be the last shots I should hear in this war. For there was great news in the world The Kaiser had abdicated, and the time for the German plenipotentiaries was running out, and the pressure on them to sign the terms of the armistice was becoming overwhelming as the hours passed. Meanwhile, our troops were outside Mons, and it looks as though fate meant it to happen that the war should end where for the British Army it began. To-day the world still awaits the greatest news of all, ending all doubts, and giving us the miracle of so quick and complete a victory, but without wireless there is a message that comes to one that all is well, and that peace is coming with the dawn after this nightmare of blood and agony.

NOVEMBER 11

OUR troops knew early this morning that the armistice had been signed. I stopped on my way to Mons outside brigade headquarters, and an officer said, "Hostilities will cease at eleven o'clock." Then he added, as all men add in their hearts, "Thank God for that!" All the way to Mons there were columns of troops on the march, and their bands played ahead of them, and almost every man had a flag on his rifle, the red, white, and blue of France, the red, yellow, and black of Belgium. They wore flowers in their caps and in their tunics, red and white chrysanthemums given them by crowds of people who cheered them on their way, people who in many of these villages had been only one day liberated from the German yoke. Our men marched singing, with a smiling light in their eyes. They had done their job, and it was finished with the greatest victory in the world.

The war ended for us at Mons, as it had begun there. When I went into this town this morning it seemed to me

a most miraculous coincidence and a joyful one. Last night there was a fight outside the town before our men forced their way in at ten o'clock. The Germans left many of their guns in the gardens before they ran. This morning Mons was full of English cavalry and Canadian troops, about whom there were crowds of townspeople, cheering them and embracing them. One old man told me of all they had suffered in Mons, but he wept only when he told me of the sufferings of our prisoners. "What shame for Germany," he said. "What shame when these things are known about your poor men starving to death. Our women tried to give them food, but were beaten for it, and fifteen days ago down there by the canal one of your English was killed because a woman gave him a bit of bread." Little children came up to me and described the fighting the night before, and many people narrated the first fighting in Mons in August of 1914, when the "Old Contemptibles" were there and fought their battle through the town, and then on their way of retreat outside.

All that is now a memory of the past. The war belongs to the past. There will be no flash of gun-fire in the sky to-night. The fires of hell have been put out, and I have written my last message as war correspondent. Thank God!

NOVEMBER 12

LAST night for the first time since August in the first year of the war there was no light of gun-fire in the sky, no sudden stabs of flame through the darkness, no long spreading glow above the black trees, where for four years of nights human beings were being smashed to death. The fires of hell had been put out. It was silent all along the front with the beautiful silence of the nights of peace. We did not stand listening to the dull rumbling of artillery at work, which has been the undertone of all closer sounds for fifteen hundred nights, nor have sudden heart-beats at explosions shaking the earth and the air, nor say in whisper

to oneself, "Curse those guns!" At eleven o'clock in the morning the order had gone to all the batteries to cease fire. No more men were to be killed, no more to be mangled, no more to be blinded. The last of the boyhood of the world was reprieved. On the way back from Mons I listened to this silence which followed the going down of the sun, and heard the rustling of the russet leaves and the little sounds of night in peace, and it seemed as though God gave a benediction to the wounded soul of the world. Other sounds rose from the towns and fields in the yellowing twilight and in the deepening shadow-world of the day of armistice. They were sounds of human joy. Men were singing somewhere on the roads, and their voices rung out gladly. Bands were playing, as all day on the way to Mons I had heard their music ahead of the marching columns. Bugles were blowing. In the villages from which the enemy had gone out that morning round about Mons crowds of figures surged in the narrow streets, and English laughter rose above the silvery chatter of women and children.

The British soldiers were still on the march with their guns, and their transport, and their old field-cookers, and all along their lines I heard these men talking to each other gaily, as though something had loosened their tongues and made them garrulous. Motor-cars streaked through the Belgian streets, dodging the traffic, and now and then when night fell rockets were fired from them, and there were gusts of laughter from young officers shooting off Verey pistols into the darkness to celebrate the end of hostilities by this symbol of rising stars, which did not soar so high as their spirits. From dark towns like Tournai and Lille these rockets rose and burned a little while with white light. Our aviators flew like bats in the dusk, skimming the tree-tops and gables, doing Puck-like gambols above the tawny sunset, looping and spiralling and falling in steep dives which looked like death for them until they flattened out and rose again, and they, too, these boys who have been reprieved from the menace which was close to them on

every flight, fired flares and rockets which dropped down to the crowds of French and Flemish people waving to them from below.

Late into the night there were sounds of singing and laughter from open windows in the towns which had been all shuttered, with the people hiding in their cellars a week ago or less, and British officers sat down to French pianos and romped about the keys and crashed out chords, and led the chorus of men who wanted to sing any old song. In the officers' clubs glasses were raised, and some one called a toast, and no one heard more than the names of England, Scotland, and France, with "victory" as the loudest word, for men had risen from all the tables, and boys were standing on their chairs, and there was the beginning of cheers which lasted five minutes, ten minutes, longer than that. And some of those who cheered had moist eyes, and were not ashamed of that because of the memories in their hearts for old pals who had gone missing on the night of the Armistice. Perhaps the old pals heard these cheers and joined in the toast, for noise of all this gladness of living men rose into the night sky along the length and breadth of all our armies. And in the midst of all this sound of exultation men had sudden silences, thinking back to the things which have passed.

Yesterday, coming back from Mons, I had no time to write more than a few words describing the best day but one, when our victory shall be sealed by peace. I had dodged a hundred mine-craters blown up by the enemy along all the roads to Mons, and had become entangled in tides of traffic, and had travelled far through liberated country. But I had been determined to get to Mons, and on the day of "Cease fire!" to go to that town, which by a happy miracle was taken in the last battle, so that the war ended for us where it began, where the "Old Contemptibles" withstood the first shock of the German arms. It was worth going to Mons yesterday with this memory in one's mind, and anyhow because of the wonderful scenes

along the roads. I have already told how I stopped at brigade headquarters on the way, and an officer there said, "Hostilities will cease at eleven o'clock this morning, and thank God for that."

With this news I went on, and saw that everywhere the news had gone ahead of me. Soldiers assembled in the fields for morning parade were flinging their steel helmets up and cheering. As they marched through the villages, they shouted out to the civilians, "Guerre fini. Boche napoo," and women and children came running to them with autumn flowers, mostly red and white chrysanthemums, and they put them in their tunics and in the straps of their steel helmets. Thousands of flags appeared suddenly in a village where no French or Belgian flag could be shown without fines and imprisonment until that very morning, when liberty had come again, and every Tommy in the ranks had a bit of colour at the end of his rifle or stuck through his belt, and every gun-team had a banner floating above its limbers or its guns, and its horses had flowers in their harness. For miles there was a pageant on the roads, and as there moved one way endless tides of British infantry and cavalry and artillery and transport with all that flutter of flags above them, with the great banners of Belgium and France like flames above them, another tide moved the opposite way, and that had its flags and its banners. It was a pitiful heroic tide of life made up of thousands of civilian people who that morning had come back through the German lines. They were the men from fifteen to sixty who had been taken away from Cambrai and Courtrai, Lille and Roubaix and Tourcoing, Tournai and Valenciennes, and hundreds of towns and villages in the wake of the enemy's retreat, because to the very end the German command had conscripted this manhood to forced labour and to prevent them from serving their own armies. Then at last yesterday, seeing that their own doom had come, they said to these people in Brussels and other

towns behind their lines: "You can go. We want no more of you."

So vast numbers of men and boys who had been forced from their homes by German bayonets, and with them thousands of women, were making their way home yesterday on all the roads through Mons and Ath. They were burdened with the luggage they had taken on their exile. The men had heavy packs strapped about them, so that they bent under the load, exhausted by long trekking, with only food enough for life. But each man had added some straws to his camel's weight by adding flags into his pack, not one flag, but mostly four or five, so that as he trudged with bent head these colours fluttered above him. There were armies of these boys, and among them were crowds of elderly men in black coats and bowler-hats with mud up to their knees and stains on their backs where they had slept on filthy straw. Groups of them, a dozen or more, pushed hand-carts made roughly out of boxes holding their wallets and packs, and so they made their way through our troops going forward, and every now and then these men stopped round their carts to raise their hats and shout, "Vivent les Anglais!" and to grasp the hands of British Tommies and say, "Bravo, bravo." The women showed the courage which has never departed from them through all these years of tragedy. They were hot and spent by this long journey on roads, and their hair had become uncoiled and their skirts were bedraggled with mud. But they had an eager look in their eyes, and strained forward at the ropes of their carts with the vision of their homes luring them on mile after mile to Tournai and Lille. I saw two of them come home yesterday and reach their journey's end. It was mother and daughter, in a village between Tournai and Mons. They halted outside their house, and saw that in their absence it had been shelled into a rubbish-heap of brickdust and broken timbers. They had travelled far to come home. . . . Outside Mons two girls walked with me across a footbridge which our Engineers

had built across the canal where all the bridges had been blown up by the enemy. One of them was a tall peasant girl, who seemed to me like Joan, the Maid of Domremy, because of the brave look in her eyes and her frank way of speech and her heroic simplicity. She described the fighting which had liberated the town that night. "I was not afraid," she said, "because I have never feared death. But machine-gun bullets were all around us, and four of our people were killed. They could not go down in their cellars because they wanted to see the English come."

She told me of the sufferings of the British prisoners, as all the people in Mons told me, and something broke in her voice at this thought, and her eyes were swept with tears. She turned for a moment in her swinging walk, and said, "Monsieur, they suffered more than I can tell. I have seen ten of your men struggle with each other to get a bit of bread lying in the mud. Because I gave them one little piece I was clubbed with a German rifle. They died of hunger, and we saw them grow weak, and we wept for them." It was from a child in Mons that I heard the fullest story of this last battle for the town. She was not more than seven, and stood on the step of my car, a little elfin creature, and in her high metallic voice very gravely described what had happened a few hours before. "Over there, Monsieur, were the German machine-guns, and they had field-guns in our gardens. Your men had come up to the line of the canal. They were Canadians, and your English cavalry, as I know, because I kissed their hands this morning, and said, 'Will you tell me who you are?' There was a great noise of firing, and the machine-guns frightened me, because of their tapping. Some Germans were killed. I think there were many dead, though I have only seen two or three dead men who are lying over there."

She pointed to some place down by the canal. She spoke like an old woman, this child of seven in the town of Mons. I met many people there who remembered the

first Battle of Mons as though it were yesterday, and in the square where thousands of people were gathered among our English Lancers and Canadian troops little groups stood round telling of those days, and pointing out the places where our men had fought in the streets before they made their line outside, and fell back in retreat before overwhelming forces. In my heart I saluted the old "Contemptibles." Some of them were there yesterday among our 5th Lancers, chosen for that purpose by General Currie, commanding the Canadian Corps.

And now the world in its heart must salute all our soldiers who through these four years and more of war have fought for this victory by great heroism through many years of horror and tragedy, with enormous sacrifice. I see only two figures in this war now that hostilities have ceased—the officers and men who have gained this victory on the British Front. One is the figure of the regimental officer, from subaltern to battalion commander, the boys and their elder brothers, who went over the top at dawn and led their men gallantly, hiding any fear of death they had, and who in dirty ditches and dug-outs, in mud and swamps, in fields under fire, in ruins that were death-traps, in all the filth and misery of this war held fast to the pride of manhood, and in the worst hours did not weaken, and for their country's sake and the game they play offered up their life, and all that life means to youth, as a free, cheap gift. And the other figure is Tommy. Poor old Tommy! You have had a rough time, and you hated it, but by the living God you have been patient and long-suffering and full of grim and silent courage, not swanking about the things you have done, not caring a jot for glory, not getting much, but now you have done your job, and it is well done.

THE FLANDERS FRONT
English Miles
0 1 2 3 4
Approximate Battle Fronts
June 1916
Dec 1917
April 1918
Land above 250 feet
" 125 to 250 "
" 0 " 125 "
POPERINGHE
YPRES
HAZEBROUCK
ESTAIRES
LILLE
BETHUNE
LA BASSEE
WARNETON
ARMENTIERES
Langhemarck
Zonnebeke
Becelaere
Poelcapelle
Passchendaele
Houthem
Comines
Frezenberg
Zillebeke
Hollebeke
Wytschaete
Messines
Wulvergem
Neuve Eglise
Deulemont
Frelinghien
Quesnoy
Armentieres
Erquinghem
Fromelles
Aubers
Wicres
Sailly
Richebourg
Festubert
Givenchy
Auchy
Cambrin
Noyelles les Vermelles
Vendin le Vieil
Carvin
Provin
Billy
Douai
Lens
Bethune
Lillers
Aire
Saint Venant
Merville
Steenwerck
Nieppe
Bailleul
Cassel
Poperinghe
Ypres
Dixmude
Furnes
Nieuport
Ostende
Bruges
Thourout
Roulers
Menin
Courtrai
Tournai
Mt Bernenchon
Ablainzevelle
Souchez
Neuville St Vaast
Roclincourt
Arras
Vimy
Lens
Douai
Cambrai
Bapaume
Albert
Amiens
Peronne
Roye
Noyon
Compiegne
Soissons
Laon
Hirson
Maubeuge
Valenciennes
Cambrai
Bouchain
Denain
Douai
Lens
Arras
Doullens
Abbeville
Boulogne
Calais
Gravelines
Dunkerque
Hazebrouck
Bergues
Cassel
Poperinghe
Ypres
Dixmude
Furnes
Nieuport
Ostende
Bruges
Thourout
Roulers
Menin
Courtrai
Tournai
Mt Bernenchon
Ablainzevelle
Souchez
Neuville St Vaast
Roclincourt
Arras
Vimy
Lens
Douai
Cambrai
Bapaume
Albert
Amiens
Peronne
Roye
Noyon
Compiegne
Soissons
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Maubeuge
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Calais
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Hazebrouck
Bergues

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